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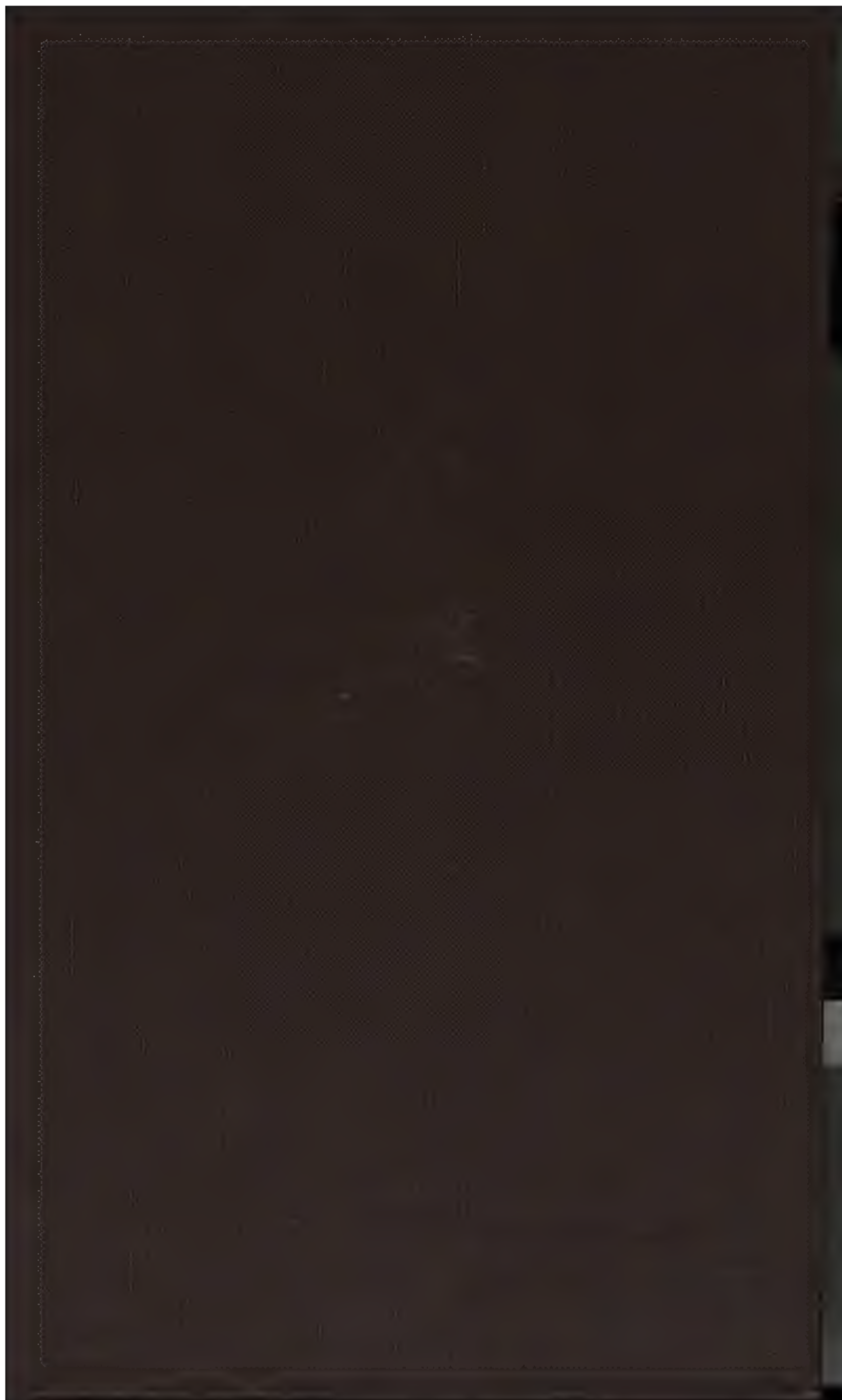
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Milton wrote no Poets. between 1640  
and 1660 except a few Sonnets.



Milton wrote no Poetry between 1640  
and 1660 except a few Sonnets.









# ESSAYS

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL:

CHIEFLY ON

ENGLISH POETS.

BY

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS Volume consists, for the most part, of a selection from Essays, on very various topics, contributed, during the last ten or twelve years, to Reviews and other periodicals. Had the selection been large enough to represent the entire series of compositions from which it is taken, the Author would have preferred arranging the papers included in it in the exact order in which they were written. The Essays chosen, however, having been such as, from their character, might most aptly go together in the same volume, it has been deemed best to arrange them in the historical order of the matters to which they refer. After a certain slight and rapid fashion, indeed, the Essays, as they here stand, will be found to present a series of views of the History of English Literature, as illustrated in the lives and writings of some of its most remarkable men, from the age of Elizabeth to our own time.

Allowing for an occasional verbal correction, and one or two omissions, the Papers, with one exception, are printed as they originally appeared. The exception is in the case of the Sketch of the Life of Chatterton; a considerable portion of which is here published for the first time.

## PREFACE.

A certain difference, also, will be observed between this ~~paper~~ and the others, both as regards the extent of space allotted to it, and as regards the manner of the literary treatment. In some respects, this portion of the Volume departs from the typical character of the Essay, and approaches that of a miniature Biography.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON,

*April* 1836.

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# ESSAYS

## BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL.

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### SHAKESPEARE AND GOETHE.\*

IF there are any two portraits which we all expect to find hung up in the rooms of those whose tastes are regulated by the highest literary culture, they are the portraits of Shakespeare and Goethe. There are, indeed, many and various gods in our modern Pantheon of genius. It contains rough gods and smooth gods, gods of symmetry and gods of strength, gods great and terrible, gods middling and respectable, and little cupids and toy-gods. Out of this variety each master of a household will select his own Penates, the appropriate gods of his own mantelpiece. The roughest will find some to worship them, and the smallest shall not want domestic adoration. But we suppose a dilettante of the first class; one who, besides excluding from his range of choice the deities of war, and cold thought, and civic action, shall further exclude from it all those even of the gods of modern literature who, whether by reason of their inferior rank, or by

\* BRITISH QUARTERLY REVIEW: November 1852. 1.—*Shakspeare and His Times*. By M. GUIZOT. 1852. 2.—*Shakspeare's Dramatic Art; and his Relation to Calderon and Goethe*. Translated from the German of Dr. HERMANN ULRICH. 1846. 3.—*Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*. Translated from the German by JOHN OXENFORD. 2 Vols. 1850.

reason of their peculiar attributes, fail as models of universal stateliness. What we should expect to see over the mantelpiece of such a rigorous person would be the images of the English Shakespeare and the German Goethe. On the one side, we will suppose, fixed with due elegance against the luxurious crimson of the wall, would be a slab of black marble exhibiting in relief a white plaster-cast of the face of Shakespeare as modelled from the Stratford bust; on the other, in a similar setting, would be a copy, if possible, of the mask of Goethe taken at Weimar after the poet's death. This would suffice; and the considerate beholder could find no fault with such an arrangement. It is true, reasons might be assigned why a third mask should have been added—that of the Italian Dante; in which case Dante and Goethe should have occupied the sides, and Shakespeare should have been placed higher up between. But the master of the house would point out how, in that case, a fine taste would have been pained by the inevitable sense of contrast between the genial mildness of the two Teutonic faces, and the severe and scornful melancholy of the poet of the *Inferno*. The face of the Italian poet, as being so different in kind, must either be reluctantly omitted, he would say, or transferred by itself to the other side of the room. Unless, indeed, with a view to satisfy the claims both of degree and of kind, Shakespeare were to be placed alone over the mantelpiece, and Dante and Goethe in company on the opposite wall, where, there being but two, the contrast would be rather agreeable than otherwise! On the whole, however, and without prejudice to new arrangements in the course of future decorations, he is content that it should be as it is.

And so, reader, for the present are we. Let us enter together, then, if it seems worth while, the room of this imaginary dilettante during his absence; let us turn the key in the lock, so that he may not come in to interrupt us; and let us look for a little time at the two masks he has provided for us over the mantelpiece, receiving such reflections as they may suggest. Doubtless we have often looked at the two masks before; but that matters little.

As we gaze at the first of the two masks, what is it that we see? A face full in contour, of good oval shape, the individual features small in proportion to the entire countenance, the greater part of which is made up of an ample and rounded forehead, and a somewhat abundant mouth and chin. The general impression is that rather of rich, fine, and very mobile tissue, than of large or decided bone. This, together with the length of the upper lip, and the absence of any set expression, imparts to the face an air of lax and luxurious calmness. It is clearly a passive face rather than an active face; a face across which moods may pass and repass, rather than a face grooved and characterized into any one permanent show of relation towards the outer world. Placed beside the mask of Cromwell, it would fail to impress, not only as being less massive and energetic, but also as being in every way less marked and determinate. It is the face, we repeat, of a literary man; one of those faces which depend for their power to impress less on the sculptor's favourite circumstance of distinct osseous form, than on the changing hue and aspect of the living flesh. And yet it is, even in form, quite a peculiar face. Instead of being, as in the ordinary thousand and one portraits of Shakespeare, a mere general face which anybody or nobody might have had, the face in the mask (and the singular portrait in the first folio edition of the poet's works corroborates it) is a face which every call-boy about the Globe theatre must have carried about with him in his imagination, without any trouble, as specifically Mr. Shakespeare's face. In complexion, as we imagine it, it was rather fair than dark; and yet not very fair either, if we are to believe Shakespeare himself—

“ But when my glass shows me myself indeed,  
Beated and chopped with tanned antiquity.”—*Sonnet 62.*

a passage, however, in which, from the nature of the mood in which it was written, we are to suppose exaggeration for the worse. In short, the face of Shakespeare, so far as we can infer what it was from the homely Stratford bust, was a genuine and even comely, but still unusual English face, distinguished by a kind of ripe intellectual fulness in the general

outline, comparative smallness in the individual features, and a look of gentle and humane repose.

Goethe's face is different. The whole size of the head is perhaps less, but the proportion of the face to the head is greater, and there is more of that determinate form which arises from prominence and strength in the bony structure. The features are individually larger, and present in their combination more of that deliberate beauty of outline which can be conveyed with effect in sculpture. The expression, however, is also that of calm intellectual repose ; and in the absence of harshness or undue concentration of the parts, one is at liberty to discover the proof that this also was the face of a man whose life was spent rather in a career of thought and literary effort than in a career of active and laborious strife. Yet the face, with all its power of fine susceptibility, is not so passive as that of Shakespeare. Its passiveness is more the passiveness of self-control, and less that of natural constitution ; the susceptibilities pass and repass over a firmer basis of permanent character ; the tremors among the nervous tissues do not reach to such depths of sheer nervous dissolution, but sooner make impact against the solid bone. The calm in the one face is more that of habitual softness and ease of humour ; the calm in the other, more that of dignified, though tolerant self-composure. It would have been more easy, we think, to have taken liberties with Shakespeare in his presence, than to have attempted a similar thing in the presence of Goethe. The one carried himself with the air of a man often diffident of himself, and whom, therefore, a foolish or impudent stranger might very well mistake till he saw him roused ; the other wore, with all his kindness and blandness, a fixed stateliness of mien and look that would have checked undue familiarity from the first. Add to all this that the face of Goethe, at least in later life, was browner and more wrinkled ; his hair more dark ; his eye also, as we think, nearer the black and lustrous in species, if less mysteriously vague and deep ; and his person perhaps the taller and more symmetrically made.\*

\* According to M. Lewes, in his ' Life of Goethe,' it is a mistake to fancy that Goethe was tall. He seemed taller than he really was.

But a truce to these guesses ! What do we actually know respecting these two men whose masks, the preserved similitudes of the living features with which they once fronted the world, are now before us ? Let us turn first to the one and then to the other, till, as we gaze at these poor eyeless images, which are all we now have, some vision of the lives and minds they typify shall swim into our ken.

Shakespeare, this Englishman who died two hundred and thirty years ago, what is he now to us his countrymen, who ought to know him best ? A great name, in the first place, of which we are proud ! That this little foggy island of England should have given birth to such a man is of itself a moiety of our acquittance among the nations. By Frenchmen, Shakespeare is accepted as at least equal to their own first ; Italians waver between him and Dante ; Germans, by race more our brethren, worship him as their own highest product too, though born by chance amongst us. All confess him to have been one of those great spirits, occasionally created, in whom the human faculties seem to have reached that extreme of expansion, on the slightest increase beyond which man would burst away into some other mode of being, and leave this behind. And why all this ? What are the special claims of Shakespeare to this high worship ? Through what mode of activity, practised while alive, has he won this immortality after he is dead ? The answer is simple. He was an artist, a poet, a dramatist. Having, during some five-and-twenty years of a life not very long, written about forty dramatic pieces, which, after being acted in several London theatres, were printed either by himself or by his executors, he has, by this means, bequeathed to the memory of the human race an immense number of verses, and to its imagination a great variety of ideal characters and creations—Lears, Othellos, Hamlets, Falstaffs, Shallows, Imogens, Mirandas, Ariels, Calibans. This, understood in its fullest extent, is what Shakespeare has done. Whatever blank in human affairs, as they now are, would be produced by the immediate withdrawal of all this intellectual capital, together with all the interest



that has been accumulated on it—*that* is the measure of what the world owes to Shakespeare.

This conception, however, while it serves vaguely to indicate to us the greatness of the man, assists us very little in the task of defining his character. In our attempts to do this, to ascend, as it were, to the living spring from which have flowed those rich poetic streams, we unavoidably rely upon two kinds of authority—the records which inform us of the leading events of his life; and the casual allusions to his person and habits left us by his contemporaries. To enumerate the ascertained events of Shakespeare's life is surely unnecessary here. How he was born at Stratford-on-Avon, in Warwickshire, in April, 1564, the son of a respectable burgess who afterwards became poor; how, having been educated with some care in his native town, he married there, at the age of eighteen, a farmer's daughter eight years older than himself; how, after employing himself as scrivener or schoolmaster, or something of that kind, in his native county for a few years more, he at length quitted it in his twenty-fourth year, and came up to London, leaving his wife and three children at Stratford; how, connecting himself with the Blackfriars theatre, he commenced the career of a poet and play-writer; how he succeeded so well in this, that, after having been a flourishing actor and theatre-proprietor, and a most popular man of genius about town for some seventeen years, he was able to leave the stage while still under forty, and return to Stratford with property sufficient to make him the most considerable man of the place; how he lived here for some twelve years more in the midst of his family, sending up occasionally a new play to town, and otherwise leading the even and tranquil existence of a country gentleman; and how, after having buried his old mother, married his daughters, and seen himself a grandfather at the age of forty-three, he was cut off rather suddenly on his fifty-third birthday, in the year 1616—all this, with a good many supplementary details for which we have to thank Mr. Collier, is, or ought to be, as familiar to educated Englishmen of the present day as the letters of the English alphabet. M. Guizot, with a little inaccuracy, has made these leading facts in the

life of the English poet tolerably familiar even to our French neighbours. But while such facts, if conceived with sufficient distinctness, serve to mark out the life of the poet in general outline, it is rather from the few notices of him that have come down to us from his contemporaries that we derive the more special impressions regarding his character and ways with which we are accustomed to fill up this outline. These notices are various; there may, perhaps, be about a dozen of them in all; but the only ones that take a very decided hold on the imagination are the three following:—

*Fuller's fancy-picture of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson at the Mermaid Tavern.*—"Many were the wit-combats betwixt him and Ben Jonson; which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war. Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow in performance. Shakespeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention."—*Written about 1650, by Thomas Fuller, born in 1608.*

*Aubrey's Sketch of Shakespeare at second hand.*—"This William, being inclined naturally to poetry and acting, came to London, I guess, about 18; and was an actor at one of the play-houses, and did act exceedingly well. (Now B. Jonson was never a good actor, but an excellent instructor.) He began early to make essays at dramatic poetry, which at that time was very low; and his plays took well. He was a handsome, well-shaped man; very good company, and of a very ready and pleasant smooth wit. The humour of the constable in '*A Midsummer Night's Dream*,' he happened to take at Grendon, in Bucks, which is the road from London to Stratford; and there was living that constable about 1642, when I first came to Oxon. Mr. Jos. Howe is of that parish; and knew him. Ben Jonson and he did gather humours of men daily wherever they came. . . . He was wont to go to his native country once a year. I think I have been told that he left 200*l.* or 300*l.* per annum, there and thereabout, to a sister. I have heard Sir William Davenant and Mr. Thomas Shadwell, who is accounted the best comedian we have now, say that he had a most prodigious wit, and did admire his natural parts beyond all other dramatical writers. He was wont to say that he never blotted out a line in his life. Said Ben Jonson 'I wish he had a blotted out a thousand.'"—*Written about 1670, by Aubrey, born 1625.*

*Ben Jonson's own Sketch of Shakespeare.*—"I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penned), he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, 'Would he had blotted a thousand!'; which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this but for their ignorance, who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted; and to justify mine own candour: for I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions, wherein he flowed with that facility that *sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped*: '*Sufflaminandus erat*,' as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too! Many times he fell into those things could not escape laughter; as when he said, in the person of Cæsar, one speaking to him, 'Cæsar, thou dost me wrong,' he replied, 'Cæsar did never wrong but with just cause,' and such like; which were ridiculous. But he redeemed his vices with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned."—*Ben Jonson's "Discoveries."*

It is sheer nonsense, with these and other such passages accessible to anybody, to go on repeating, as people seem determined to do, the hackneyed saying of the commentator Steevens, that "all that we know of Shakespeare is, that he was born at Stratford-on-Avon; married and had children there; went to London, where he commenced actor, and wrote plays and poems; returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried."\* It is our own fault, and not the fault of the materials, if we do not know a great deal more about Shakespeare than that; if we do not realize, for example, these distinct and indubitable facts about him—his special reputation among the critics of his time, as a man not so much of erudition as of prodigious natural genius; his gentleness and openness of disposition; his popular and sociable habits; his extreme ease, and, as some thought, negligence in composition; and, above all, and most characteristic of all, his excessive fluency in speech. "He sometimes required stopping," is Ben Jonson's expression; and whoever does not see a whole volume of revelation respecting Shakespeare in that single trait, has no eye for seeing anything. Let no one ever lose sight of that phrase in trying to imagine Shakespeare.

Still, after all, we cannot be content thus. With regard to such a man we cannot rest satisfied with a mere picture of his exterior in its aspect of repose, or in a few of its common attitudes. We seek, as the phrase is, to penetrate into his heart—to detect and to fix in everlasting portraiture that mood of his soul which was ultimate and characteristic; in which, so to speak, he came ready-fashioned from the Creator's hands; towards which he always sank when alone; and on the ground-melody of which all his thoughts and actions were but voluntary variations. As far short of such a result as would be any notion we could form of the poet Burns from a mere chronological outline of his life, together with a few stories

\* This saying of Steevens, though still repeated in books, has lost its force with the public. The Lives of Shakespeare by Mr. Halliwell and Mr. Charles Knight, written on such different principles, have effectually dissipated the old impression. Mr. Knight, by his use of the principle of synchronism, and his accumulation of picturesque details, in his Biography of Shakespeare, has left the public without excuse, if they still believe in Steevens.

such as are current about his moral irregularities ; so far short of a true appreciation of Shakespeare would be that idea of him which we could derive from the scanty fund of the external evidence.

And here it is, that, in proceeding to make up the deficiency of the external evidence by going to the only other available source of light on the subject, namely the bequeathed writings of the man himself, we find ourselves obstructed at the outset by an obvious difficulty, which does not exist to the same extent in most other cases. We can, with comparative ease, recognise Burns himself in his works ; for Burns is a lyrist, pouring out his own feelings in song, often alluding to himself, and generally under personal agitation when he writes. Shakespeare, on the other hand, is a dramatist, whose function it was not to communicate, but to create. Had he been a dramatist of the same school as Ben Jonson, indeed, using the drama as a means of spreading, or, at all events, as a medium through which to insinuate, his opinions ; and often indicating his purposes by the very names of his *dramatis personæ* (as Downright, Merecraft, Eitherside, and the like)—then the task would have been easier. But it is not so with Shakespeare. Less than almost any man that ever wrote, does he inculcate or dogmatise. He is the very type of the poet. He paints, represents, creates, holds the mirror up to nature ; but from opinion, doctrine, controversy, theory, he holds instinctively aloof. In each of his plays there is a “central idea,” to use the favourite term of the German critics—that is, a single thought round which all may be exhibited as consciously or unconsciously crystallized ; but there is no pervading maxim, no point set forth to be argued or proved. Of none of all the plays can it be said that it is more than any other a vehicle for fixed articles in the creed of Shakespeare.

One quality or attribute of Shakespeare’s genius, we do, indeed, contrive to seize out of this very difficulty of seizing anything—that quality or attribute of *many-sidedness*, of which we have heard so much for the last century and a half. The immense variety of his characters and conceptions, embracing as it does Hamlets and Falstaffs, Kings and Clowns,



Prosperos and Dogberrys, and his apparently equal ease in handling them all, are matters that have been noted by one and all of the critics. And thus, while his own] character is lost in his incessant shiftings through such a succession of masks, we yet manage, as it were in revenge, to extract from the very impossibility of describing him an adjective which does possess a kind of quasi-descriptive value. It is as if of some one that had baffled all our attempts to investigate him, we were to console ourselves by saying that he was a perfect Proteus. We call Shakespeare "many-sided;" not a magazine, nor a lady at a literary party, but tells you that; and in adding this to our list of adjectives concerning him, we find a certain satisfaction, and even an increase of light.

But it would be cowardice to stop here. The old sea-god Proteus himself, despite his subtlety and versatility, had a real form and character of his own, into which he could be compelled, if one only knew the way. Hear how they served this old gentleman in the *Odyssey*.

"We at once,  
Loud shouting, flew on him, and in our arms  
Constrained him fast; nor the sea-prophet old  
Called not incontinent his shifts to mind.  
First he became a long-maned lion grim;  
A dragon then, a panther, a huge boar,  
A limpid stream, and an o'ershadowing tree  
We, persevering, held him; till, at length,  
The subtle sage, his ineffectual arts  
Resigning weary, questioned me and spoke."

And so with *our* Proteus. The many-sidedness of the dramatist, let it be well believed and pondered, is but the versatility in form of a certain personal and substantial being, which constitutes the specific mind of the dramatist himself. Precisely as we have insisted that Shakespeare's face, as the best portraits represent it to us, is no mere general face or face to let, but a good, decided, and even rather singular face; so, we would insist, he had as specific a character, as thoroughly a way of his own in thinking about things and going through his morning and evening hours, as any of ourselves. "Man is only many-sided," says Goethe, "when he strives after the highest because he *must*, and descends to the lesser because he

*will*;" that is, as we interpret, when he is borne on in a certain noble direction in all that he does by the very structure of his mind, while, at his option, he may keep planting this fixed path or not with a sportive and flowery border. By the necessity of his nature, Shakespeare was compelled in a certain earnest direction in all that he did; and it is our part to search through the thickets of imagery and gratuitous fiction amid which he spent his life, that this path may be discovered. As the lion, or the limpid stream, or the overshadowing tree, into which Proteus turned himself, was not a real lion, or a real stream, or a real tree, but only Proteus as the one or as the other; so, involved in each of Shakespeare's characters,—in Hamlet, in Falstaff, or in Romeo,—involved in some deep manner in each of these diverse characters, is Shakespeare's own nature. If Shakespeare had not been precisely and wholly Shakespeare, and not any other man actual or conceivable, could Hamlet or Falstaff, or any other of his creations, have been what they are?

But how to evolve Shakespeare from his works, how to compel this Proteus into his proper and native form, is still the question. It is a problem of the highest difficulty. Something, indeed, of the poet's personal character and views we cannot help gathering, as we read his dramas. Passages again and again occur there, of which, from their peculiar effect upon ourselves, from their conceivable reference to what we know of the poet's circumstances, or from their evident superfluosity and warmth, we do not hesitate to aver, "There speaks the poet's own heart." But to show generally how much of the man has passed into the poet, and how it is that his personal bent and peculiarities are to be surely detected inhering in writings whose essential character it is to be arbitrary and universal, is a task from which a critic might well shrink, were he left merely to the ordinary resources of critical ingenuity, without any positive and ascertained clue.

In this case, however, all the world ought to know, there is a positive and ascertained clue. Shakespeare has left to us not merely a collection of dramas, the exercises of his creative phantasy in a world of ideal matter, but also certain poems



which are assuredly and expressly autobiographic. Criticism seems now pretty conclusively to have determined, what it ought to have determined long ago, that the *Sonnets* of Shakespeare are, and can possibly be, nothing else than a poetical record of his own feelings and experience—a connected series of entries, as it were, in his own diary—during a certain period of his London life. This, we say, is conclusively determined and agreed upon; and whoever does not, to some extent, hold this view, knows nothing about the subject. Ulrici, who is a genuine investigator, as well as a profound critic, is, of course, right on this point. So, also, in the main, is M. Guizot, although he mars the worth of the conclusion by adducing the foolish theory of *Euphuism*—that is, of the adoption of an affected style of expression in vogue in Shakespeare's age—in order to explain away that which is precisely the most important thing about the sonnets, and the very thing *not* to be explained away; namely, the depth and strangeness of their pervading sentiment, and the curious hyperbolism of their style. In truth, it is the very closeness of the contact into which the right view of the sonnets brings us with Shakespeare, the very value of the information respecting him to which it opens the way, that operates against it. Where we have so eager a desire to know, there we fear to believe, lest what we have once cherished on so great a subject we should be obliged again to give up; or lest, if our imaginations should dare to figure aught too exact and familiar regarding the traits and motions of so royal a spirit, the question should be put to us, what *we* can know of the halls of a palace, or the mantled tread of a king? Still the fact is as it is; these *Sonnets* of Shakespeare *are* autobiographic—distinctly, intensely, painfully autobiographic, although in a style and after a fashion of autobiography so peculiar, that we can cite only Dante in his *Vita Nuova*, and Tennyson in his *In Memoriam*, as having furnished precisely similar examples of it.

We are not going to examine the *Sonnets* in detail here, nor to tell the story which they involve as a whole. We will indicate generally, however, the impression which, we think,

a close investigation of them will infallibly leave on any thoughtful reader, as to the characteristic personal qualities of that mind, the larger and more factitious emanations from which still cover and astonish the world.

The general and aggregate effect, then, of these sonnets, as contributing to our knowledge of Shakespeare as a man, is to antiquate, or at least to reduce very much in value, the common idea of him implied in such phrases as William the Calm, William the Cheerful, and the like. These phrases are true, when understood in a certain very obvious sense ; but if we were to select that designation which would, as we think, express Shakespeare in his most intimate and private relations to man and nature, we should rather say, William the Meditative, William the Metaphysical, or William the Melancholy. Let not the reader who is full of the just idea of Shakespeare's wonderful concreteness as a poet, be staggered by the second of these phrases. The phrase is a good phrase ; etymologically, it is perhaps the best phrase we could here use ; and whatever of inappropriateness there may seem to be in it, proceeds from false associations, and will vanish, we hope, before we have done with it. Nor let it be supposed that, in using, as nearly synonymous, the word Melancholy, we mean anything so absurd as that the author of Falstaff was a Werther. What we mean is, that there is evidence in the sonnets, corroborated by other proof on all hands, that the mind of Shakespeare, when left to itself, was apt to sink into that state in which thoughts of what is sad and mysterious in the universe most easily come and go.

At no time, except during sleep, is the mind of any human being completely idle. All men have some natural and congenial mood into which they fall when they are left to talk with themselves. One man recounts the follies of the past day, renewing the relish of them by the recollection ; another uses his leisure to hate his enemy and to scheme his discomfiture ; a third rehearses in imagination, in order to be prepared, the part which he is to perform on the morrow. Now, at such moments, as we believe, it was the habit of Shakespeare's mind, obliged thereto by the necessity of its

structure, to ponder ceaselessly those questions relating to man, his origin, and his destiny, in familiarity with which consists what is called the spiritual element in human nature. It was Shakespeare's use, as it seems to us, to revert often, when alone, to that ultimate mood of the soul, in which one hovers wistfully on the borders of the finite, vainly pressing against the barriers that separate it from the unknown; that mood in which even what is common and under foot seems part of a vast current mystery, and in which, like Arabian Job of old, one looks by turns at the heaven above, the earth beneath, and one's own moving body between, interrogating whence it all is, why it all is, and whither it all tends. And this, we say, is Melancholy. It is more. It is that mood of man, which, most of all moods, is thoroughly, grandly, specifically human. That which is the essence of all worth, all beauty, all humour, all genius, is open or secret reference to the supernatural; and this is sorrow. The attitude of a finite creature, contemplating the infinite, can only be that of an exile—grief and wonder blending in a wistful longing for an unknown home.

As we consider this frame of mind to have been characteristic of Shakespeare, so we find that he has not forgotten to represent it as a poet. We have always fancied *Hamlet* to be a closer translation of Shakespeare's own character than any other of his personations. The same meditateness, the same morbid reference at all times to the supernatural, the same inordinate development of the speculative faculty, the same intellectual melancholy, that are seen in the Prince of Denmark, seem to have distinguished Shakespeare. Nor is it possible here to forget that minor and lower form of the same fancy—the ornament of *As you like it*, the melancholy Jaques.

"Jaques. More, more, I pr'ythee, more!

Amiens. It will make you melancholy, Monsieur Jaques.

Jaques. I thank it. More, I pr'ythee, more! I can suck melancholy out of a song, as a weasel sucks eggs. More, I pr'ythee, more!

Amiens. My voice is rugged; I know I cannot please you.

Jaques. I do not desire you to please me; I desire you to sing.

Rosalind. They say you are a melancholy fellow.

Jaques. I am so, I do love it better than laughing.

*Rosalind.* Those that are in extremity of either are abominable fellows, and betray themselves to every modern censure, worse than drunkards.

*Jaques.* Why, 'tis good to be sad, and say nothing.

*Rosalind.* Why, then, 'tis good to be a post.

*Jaques.* I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician's, which is fantastical; nor the courtier's, which is proud; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer's, which is politic; nor the lady's, which is nice; nor the lover's, which is all these: but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects; and, indeed, the sundry 'contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me, is a most humorous sadness."

Jaques is not Shakespeare; but in writing this description of Jaques, Shakespeare drew from his knowledge of himself. His also was a "melancholy of his own," a "humorous sadness in which his often rumination wrapt him." In that declared power of Jaques of "sucking melancholy out of a song," the reference of Shakespeare to himself seems almost direct. Nay, more, as Rosalind, in rating poor Jaques, tells him on one occasion, that he is so abject a fellow, that she verily believes he is "out of love with his nativity, and almost chides God *for making him of that countenance that he is;*" so Shakespeare's melancholy, in one of his sonnets, takes exactly the same form of self-dissatisfaction.

"When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,  
I all alone bewEEP my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf Heaven with my bootless cries,  
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,  
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
*Featured like him*, like him with friends possessed,  
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,  
With what I most enjoy contented least;  
Yet, in these thoughts myself almost despising,  
Haply I think on thee," &c.

Think of that, reader! That mask of Shakespeare's face, which we have been discussing, Shakespeare himself did not like; and there were moments in which he was so abject as actually to wish that he had received from Nature another man's physical features!

If Shakespeare's melancholy was, like that of Jaques, a complex melancholy—a melancholy "compounded of many simples," extracted perhaps at first from some root of bitter experience in his own life, and then fed, as his sonnets clearly state, by a habitual sense of his own "outcast" condition in society, and by the sight of a hundred social wrongs around

him, into a kind of abject dissatisfaction with himself and his fate ; yet, in the end, and in its highest form, it was rather, as we have already hinted, the melancholy of Hamlet—a meditative, contemplative melancholy, embracing human life as a whole ; the melancholy of a mind incessantly tending from the real (*τα φυσικα*) to the metaphysical (*τα μετα τα φυσικα*), and only brought back by external occasion from the metaphysical to the real.

Do not let us quarrel about the words, if we can agree about the thing. Let any competent person whatever read the Sonnets, and then, with their impression on him, pass to the plays, and he will inevitably become aware of Shakespeare's personal fondness for certain themes or trains of thought, particularly that of the speed and destructiveness of time. Death, vicissitude, the march and tramp of generations across life's stage, the rotting of human bodies in the earth—these and all the other forms of the same thought were familiar to Shakespeare to a degree beyond what is to be seen in the case of any other poet. It seems to have been a habit of his mind, when left to its own tendency, ever to indulge by preference in that oldest of human meditations, which is not yet trite—"Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble ; he cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down : he fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not." Let us cite a few examples from the sonnets :—

"When I consider everything that grows  
Holds in perfection but a little moment ;  
That this huge state presenteth nought but shows,  
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment."—*Sonnet 15.*

"If thou survive my well-contented clay,  
When that churl, Death, my bones with dust shall cover."—*Sonnet 32.*

"No longer mourn for me, when I am dead,  
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell  
Give warning to the world that I am fled  
From this vile world, with viler worms to dwell."—*Sonnet 71.*

"The wrinkles, which thy glass will truly show,  
Of mouthed graves will give thee memory ;  
Thou, by thy dial's shady stealth, may'st know  
Time's thievish progress to eternity."—*Sonnet 77.*

"Or shall I live your epitaph to make,  
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten ?"—*Sonnet 81.*



These are but one or two out of many such passages, occurring in the sonnets. Indeed, it may be said, that wherever Shakespeare pronounces the words time, age, death, &c., it is with a deep and cutting personal emphasis, quite different from the usual manner of poets in their stereotyped allusions to mortality. Time, in particular, seems to have tenanted his imagination as a kind of grim and hideous personal existence, cruel out of mere malevolence of nature. Death, too, had become to him a kind of actual being or fury, morally unamiable, and deserving of reproach,—“that churl, Death.”

If we turn to the plays of Shakespeare, we shall find that in them, too, the same morbid sensitiveness to all associations with mortality is continually breaking out. The vividness, for example, with which Juliet describes the interior of a charnel-house, partakes of a spirit of revenge, as if Shakespeare were retaliating, through her, upon an object horrible to himself.

“Or hide me nightly in a charnel-house,  
O’ercovered quite with dead men’s rattling bones,  
With reeky shanks, and yellow chapless skulls.”

More distinctly revengeful is Romeo’s ejaculation at the tomb.

“Thou détestable maw, thou womb of Death,  
Gorged with the dearest morsel of the earth,  
Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open !”

And who does not remember the famous passage in *Measure for Measure*?—

“*Claudio.* Death is a fearful thing.  
*Isabella.* And shaméd life is hateful.  
*Claudio.* Ay, but to die, and go we know not where—  
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot !  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod ; and the delighted spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside  
In thrilling regions of thick-ribbéd ice ;  
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,  
And blown with restless violence round about  
The pendent world ; or to be worse than worst  
Of those that lawless and uncertain thoughts  
Imagine howling ! ’Tis too horrible.  
The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment,  
Can lay on nature, is a paradise  
To what we fear of Death.”

Again, in the grave-digging scene in *Hamlet*, we see the same fascinated familiarity of the imagination with all that pertains to churchyards, coffins, and the corruption within them.

*Hamlet.* Pr'ythee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

*Horatio.* What's that, my lord?

*Hamlet.* Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' the earth?

*Horatio.* E'en so.

*Hamlet.* And smelt so? Pah! (*Throws down the skull.*)

*Horatio.* E'en so, my lord!

*Hamlet.* To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bung-hole?

*Horatio.* 'Twere to reason too curiously to consider so.

*Hamlet.* No, faith, not a jot; but to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it. As thus:—Alexander died; Alexander was buried; Alexander returned to dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam; and why of that loam whereto he was converted might we not stop a beer-barrel?

Imperial Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,  
May stop a hole to keep the wind away;  
O that that flesh that kept the world in awe  
Should stop a hole to expel the winter's flaw!

Observe how Shakespeare here defends, through Hamlet, his own tendency "too curiously" to consider death. To sum up all, however, let us turn to that unparalleled burst of language in the *Tempest*, in which the poet has defeated time itself by chivalrously proclaiming to all time what time can do:—

"And, like the baseless fabric of a vision,  
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself—  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And, like this unsubstantial pageant, faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made of; and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep."

This, we contend, is no mere poetic phrensy, inserted because it was dramatically suitable that Prospero should so express himself at that place; it is the explosion into words of a feeling during which Prospero was forgotten, and Shakespeare swooned into himself. And what is the continuation of the passage but a kind of postscript, describing, under the guise of Prospero, Shakespeare's own agitation with what he had just written?

“ ————— Sir, I am vexed;  
 Bear with my weakness; my old brain is troubled;  
 Be not disturbed with my infirmity.  
 If you be pleased, retire into my cell,  
 And there repose. *A turn or two I'll walk,*  
*To still my beating mind.*”

To our imagination the surmise is that Shakespeare here laid down his pen, and began to pace his chamber, too agitated to write more that night.

In this extreme familiarity with the conception of mortality in general, and perhaps also in this extreme sensitiveness to the thought of death as a matter of personal import, all great poets, and possibly all great men whatever, have to some extent resembled Shakespeare. For these are the feelings of our common nature on which religion and all solemn activity have founded and maintained themselves. Space and Time are the largest and the outermost of all human conceptions; to stand, therefore, incessantly upon these extreme conceptions, as upon the perimeter of a figure, and to view all inwards from them, is the highest exercise of thought to which a human being can attain. Accordingly, in all great poets there may be discerned this familiarity of the imagination with the world, figured as a poor little ball pendent in space, and moving forward out of a dark past to a future of light or gloom. But in this respect Shakespeare exceeds them all; and in this respect, therefore, no poet is more religious, more spiritual, more profoundly metaphysical than he. Into an inordinate amount of that outward pressure of the soul against the perimeter of sensible things, infuse the peculiar *moral* germ of Christianity, and you have the religion of Shakespeare. Thus:—

“ And our little life  
 Is rounded with a sleep.”—*Tempest*.

Here the poetic imagination sweeps boldly round the universe, severing it as by a soft cloud-line from the infinite Unknown.

“ Poor soul! the centre of my sinful earth,  
 Fooled by those rebel powers that lead thee 'stray!”—*Sonnet 146*.

Here the soul, retracting its thoughts from the far and physical, dwells disgustedly on itself.

“ The dread of something after death—  
 The undiscovered country, from whose bourne  
 No traveller returns.”—*Hamlet*.



Here the soul, pierced with the new and awful thought of sin, wings out again towards the Infinite, and finds all dark.

“ How would you be,  
If He which is the top of judgment should  
But judge you as you are ? ” — *Measure for Measure*.

Here the silver lamp of hope is hung up within the gloomy sphere, to burn softly and faintly for ever !

And so it is throughout Shakespeare's writings. Whatever is special or doctrinal is avoided ; all that intellectual tackling, so to speak, is struck away that would afford the soul any relief whatever from the whole sensation of the supernatural. Although we cannot, therefore, in honest keeping with popular language, call Shakespeare, as Ulrici does, the most Christian of poets, we believe him to have been the man in modern times, who, breathing an atmosphere full of Christian conceptions, and walking amid a civilization studded with Christian institutions, had his whole being tied by the closest personal links to those highest generalities of the universe which the greatest minds in all ages have ever pondered and meditated, and round which Christianity has thrown its clasp of gold.

Shakespeare, then, we hold to have been essentially a meditative, speculative, and even, in his solitary hours, an abject and melancholy man, rather than a man of active, firm, and worldly disposition. Instead of being a calm, stony observer of life and nature, as he has been sometimes represented, we believe him to have been a man of the gentlest and most troublesome affections ; of sensibility abnormally keen and deep ; full of metaphysical longings ; liable above most men to self-distrust, despondency, and mental agitation from causes internal and external ; and a prey to many secret and severe experiences which he did not discuss at the Mermaid tavern. This, we say, is no guess ; it is a thing certified under his own hand and seal. But this being allowed, we are willing to agree with all that is said of him, by way of indicating the immense variety of faculties, dispositions, and acquirements of which his character was built up. Vast intellectual inquisitiveness, the readiest and most universal humour, the truest

sagacity and knowledge of the world, the richest and deepest capacity of enjoying all that life presented—all this, as applied to Shakespeare, is a mere string of undeniable commonplaces. The man, as we fancy him, who of all others trod the oftenest the extreme metaphysic walk which bounds our universe in, he was also the man of all others who was related most keenly by every fibre of his being to all the world of the real and the concrete. Better than any man he knew life to be a dream; with as vivid a relish as any man he did his part as one of the dreamers. If at one moment life stood before his mental gaze, an illuminated little speck or disc, softly rounded with mysterious sleep, the next moment this mere span shot out into an illimitable plain, whereon he himself stood—a plain covered with forests, parted by seas, studded with cities and huge concourses of men, mapped out into civilizations, overcanopied by stars. Nay, it was precisely because he came and went with such instant transition between the two extremes, that he behaved so genially and sympathetically in the latter. It was precisely because he had done the metaphysic feat so completely once for all, and did not bungle on metaphysicizing bit by bit amid the real, that he stood forth in the character of the most concrete of poets. Life is an illusion, a show, a phantasm; well then, that is settled, and *I* belong to that section of the illusion called London, the seventeenth century, and woody Warwickshire! So he may have said; and he acted accordingly. He walked amid the woods of Warwickshire, and listened to the birds singing in their leafy retreats; he entered the Mermaid tavern with Ben Jonson, after the theatre was over, and found himself quite properly related, as one item in the illusion, to that other item in it, a good supper and a cup of canary. He accepted the world as it was; rejoiced in its joys, was pained by its sorrows, revered its dignities, respected its laws, and laughed at its whimsies. It was this very strength, and intimacy, and universality of his relations to the concrete world of nature and life, that caused in him that spirit of acquiescence in things as they were, that evident conservatism of temper, that indifference, or perhaps more, to the specific contemporary forms of social and intellec-

tual movement with which he has sometimes been charged as a fault. The habit of attaching weight to what are called abstractions, of metaphysicizing bit by bit amid the real, is almost an essential feature in the constitution of men who are remarkable for their faith in social progress. It was precisely, therefore, because Shakespeare was such a votary of the concrete, because he walked so firmly on the green and solid sward of that island of life which he knew to be surrounded by a metaphysic sea, that this or that metaphysical proposal with respect to the island itself occupied him but little.

How, then, *did* Shakespeare relate himself to this concrete world of nature and life in which his lot had been cast? What precise function with regard to it, if not that of an active partisan of progress, did he accept as devolving naturally on *him*? The answer is easy. Marked out by circumstances, and by his own bent and inclination, from the vast majority of men, who, with greater or less faculty, sometimes perhaps with the greatest, pass their lives in silence, appearing in the world at their time, enjoying it for a season, and returning to the earth again; marked out from among these, and appointed to be one of those whom the whole earth should remember and think of; yet precluded, as we have seen, by his constitution and fortune, from certain modes of attaining to this honour—the special function which, in this high place, he saw himself called upon to discharge, and by the discharge of which he has ensured his place in perpetuity, was simply that of *expressing* what he felt and saw. In other words, Shakespeare was specifically and transcendently a literary man. To say that he was the greatest *man* that ever lived is to provoke a useless controversy and comparisons that lead to nothing, between Shakespeare and Caesar, Shakespeare and Charlemagne, Shakespeare and Cromwell; to say that he was the greatest *intellect* that ever lived, is to bring the shades of Aristotle and Plato, and Bacon and Newton, and all the other systematic thinkers grumbling about us, with demands for a definition of intellect, which we are by no means in a position to give; nay, finally, to say that he is the greatest *poet* that

the world has produced (a thing which we would certainly say, were we provoked to it,) would be unnecessarily to hurt the feelings of Homer and Sophocles, Dante and Milton. What we will say, then, and what we will challenge the world to gainsay, is, that he was the greatest *expresser* that ever lived. This is glory enough, and it leaves the other questions open. Other men may have led, on the whole, greater and more impressive lives than he; other men, acting on their fellows through the same medium of speech that he used, may have expended a greater power of thought, and achieved a greater intellectual effect, in one consistent direction; other men, too (though this is very questionable), may have contrived to issue the matter which they did address to the world, in more compact and perfect artistic shapes. But no man that ever lived said such splendid things on all subjects universally; no man that ever lived had the faculty of pouring out on all occasions such a flood of the richest and deepest language. He may have had rivals in the art of imagining situations; he had no rival in the power of sending a gush of the appropriate intellectual effusion over the image and body of a situation once conceived. From a jewelled ring on an alderman's finger to the most mountainous thought or deed of man or demon, nothing suggested itself that his speech could not envelope and enfold with ease. That excessive fluency which astonished Ben Jonson when he listened to Shakespeare in person, astonishes the world yet. Abundance, ease, redundancy, a plenitude of word, sound, and imagery, which, were the intellect at work only a little less magnificent, would sometimes end in sheer braggardism and bombast, are the characteristics of Shakespeare's style. Nothing is suppressed, nothing omitted, nothing cancelled. On and on the poet flows; words, thoughts, and fancies crowding on him as fast as he can write, all related to the matter on hand, and all poured forth together, to rise and fall on the waves of an established cadence. Such lightness and ease in the manner, and such prodigious wealth and depth in the matter, are combined in no other writer. How the matter was first accumulated, what proportion of it was the acquired capital of former efforts,

and what proportion of it welled up in the poet's mind during and in virtue of the very act of speech, it is impossible to say ; but this at least may be affirmed without fear of contradiction, that there never was a mind in the world from which, when it was pricked by any occasion whatever, there poured forth on the instant such a stream of precious substance intellectually related to it. By his powers of expression, in fact, Shakespeare has beggared all his posterity, and left mere practitioners of expression nothing possible to do. There is perhaps not a thought, or feeling, or situation, really common and generic to human life, on which he has not exercised his prerogative ; and, wherever he has once been, woe to the man that comes after him ! He has overgrown the whole system and face of things like a universal ivy, which has left no wall uncovered, no pinnacle unclimbed, no chink unpenetrated. Since he lived, the concrete world has worn a richer surface. He found it great and beautiful, with stripes here and there of the rough old coat seen through the leafy labours of his predecessors ; he left it clothed throughout with the wealth and autumnal luxuriance of his own unparalleled language.

This brings us, by a very natural connexion, to what we have to say of Goethe. For, if, with the foregoing impressions on our mind respecting the character and the function of the great English poet, we turn to the task of his German successor and admirer, which has been so long waiting our notice, the first question must infallibly be, What recognition is it possible that, in such circumstances, we can have left for *him* ? In other words, the first consideration that must be taken into account in any attempt to appreciate Goethe is, that he came into a world in which Shakespeare had been before him. For a man who, in the main, was to pursue a course so similar to that which Shakespeare had pursued, this was a matter of incalculable importance. Either, on the one hand, the value of all that the second man could do, if he adhered to a course precisely similar, must suffer from the fact that he was following in the footsteps of a predecessor of such unapproachable excellence ; or, on the other hand, the con-



sciousness of this, if it came in time, would be likely to *prevent* too close a resemblance between the lives of the two men, by giving a special direction and character to the efforts of the second. Hear Goethe himself on this very point:—

“We discoursed upon English literature, on the greatness of Shakespeare, and on the unfavourable position held by all English dramatic authors who had appeared after that poetical giant. ‘A dramatic talent of any importance,’ said Goethe, ‘could not forbear to notice Shakespeare’s works; nay, could not forbear to study them. Having studied them, he must be aware that Shakespeare has already exhausted the whole of human nature in all its tendencies, in all its heights and depths, and that, in fact, there remains for him, the aftercomer, nothing more to do. And how could one get courage to put pen to paper, if one were conscious, in an earnest appreciating spirit, that such unfathomable and unattainable excellences were already in existence? It fared better with me fifty years ago in my own dear Germany. I could soon come to an end with all that then existed; it could not long awe me, or occupy my attention. I soon left behind me German literature, and the study of it, and turned my thoughts to life and to production. So on and on I went, in my own natural development, and on and on I fashioned the productions of epoch after epoch. And, at every step of life and development, my standard of excellence was not much higher than what at such a step I was able to attain. But had I been born an Englishman, and had all those numerous masterpieces been brought before me in all their power, at my first dawn of youthful consciousness, they would have overpowered me, and I should not have known what to do. I could not have gone on with such fresh light-heartedness, but should have had to bethink myself, and look about for a long time to find some new outlet.’”—*Eckermann’s Conversations of Goethe*, i. pp. 114, 115.

All this is very clear and happily expressed. Most Englishmen that have written since Shakespeare *have* been overawed by the sense of his vast superiority; and Goethe, if he had been an Englishman, would have partaken of the same feeling, and would have been obliged, as he says, to look about for some path in which competition with such a predecessor would have been avoided. Being, however, a German, and coming at a time when German literature had nothing so great to boast of but that an ardent young man could hope to produce something as good or better, the way was certainly open to him to the attainment, in his own nation, of a position analogous to that which Shakespeare had occupied in his. Goethe might, if he had chosen, have aspired to be the Shakespeare of Germany. Had his tastes and faculties pointed in that direction, there was no reason, special to his own nation, that would have made it very incumbent on him to thwart the tendency of his genius and seek about for a new outlet in order to escape injurious comparisons. But, even under such circumstances, to have pursued a course *very* similar to that

of Shakespeare, and to have been animated by a mere ambition to tread in the footsteps of that master, would have been death to all chance of a reputation among the highest. Great writers do not exclusively belong to the country of their birth; the greatest of all are grouped together on a kind of central platform, in the view of all peoples and tongues; and, as in this select assemblage no duplicates are permitted, the man who does never so well a second time that which the world has already canonized a man for doing once, has little chance of being admitted to coequal honours. More especially, too, in the present case, would too close a resemblance to the original, whether in manner or in purpose, have been regarded in the end as a reason for inferiority in place. As the poet of one branch of the great Germanic family of mankind, Shakespeare belonged indirectly to the Germans, even before they recognised him; in him all the genuine qualities of Teutonic human nature, as well as the more special characteristics of English genius, were embodied once for all in the particular form which had chanced to be his; and had Goethe been, in any marked sense, only a repetition of the same form, he might have held his place for some time as the wonder of Germany, but, as soon as the course of events had opened up the communication which was sure to take place at some time between the German and the English literatures, and so made his countrymen acquainted with Shakespeare, he would have lost his extreme brilliance, and become but a star of the second magnitude. In order, then, that Goethe might hold permanently a first rank even among his own countrymen, it was necessary that he should be a man of a genius quite distinct from that of Shakespeare; a man who, having or not having certain Shakespearian qualities, should at all events signalize such qualities as he had by a marked character and function of his own. And if this was necessary to secure to Goethe a first rank in the literature of Germany, much more was it necessary to ensure his place as one of the intellectual potentates of the whole modern world. If Goethe was to be admitted into this select company at all, it could not be as a mere younger brother of Shakespeare, but as a man whom Shakespeare

himself, when he took him by the hand, would look at with curiosity, as something new in species, produced in the earth since his own time.

Was this, then, the case? Was Goethe, with all his external resemblance in some respects to Shakespeare, a man of such truly individual character, and of so new and marked a function, as to deserve a place among the highest, not in German literature alone, but in the literature of the world as a whole? We do not think that any one competent to give an opinion will reply in the negative.

A glance at the external circumstances of Goethe's life alone (and what a contrast there is between the abundance of biographic material respecting Goethe and the scantiness of our information respecting Shakespeare!) will beget the impression that the man who led such a life must have had opportunities for developing a very unusual character. The main facts in the life of Goethe, as all know, are these:—that he was born at Frankfort-on-the-Main, in 1749, the only surviving son of parents who ranked among the wealthiest in the town; that, having been educated with extreme care, and having received whatever experience could be acquired by an impetuous student-life, free from all ordinary forms of hardship, first at one German town and then at another, he devoted himself, in accordance with his tastes, to a career of literary activity; that, after unwinding himself from several love-affairs, and travelling for the sake of farther culture in Italy and other parts of Europe, he settled in early manhood at Weimar, as the intimate friend and counsellor of the reigning duke of that state; that there, during a long and honoured life, in the course of which he married an inferior house-keeper kind of person, of whom we do not hear much, he prosecuted his literary enterprise with unwearied industry, not only producing poems, novels, dramas, essays, treatises, and criticisms in great profusion from his own pen, but also acting, along with Schiller and others, as a director and guide of the whole contemporary intellectual movement of his native land; and that finally, having outlived all his famous associates, become a widower and a grandfather, and attained the



position not only of the acknowledged king and patriarch of German literature, but also, as some thought, of the wisest and most serene intellect of Europe, he died so late as 1832, in the eighty-third year of his age. All this, it will be observed, is very different from the life of the prosperous Warwickshire player, whose existence had illustrated the early part of the seventeenth century in England; and necessarily denoted, at the same time, a very different cast of mind and temper.

Accordingly, such descriptions as we have of Goethe from those who knew him best convey the idea of a character notably different from that of the English poet. Of Shakespeare personally we have but one uniform account that he was a man of gentle presence and disposition, very good company, and of such boundless fluency and intellectual inventiveness in talk, that his hearers could not always stand it, but had sometimes to whistle him down in his flights. In Goethe's case we have two distinct pictures. In youth, as all accounts agree in stating, he was one of the most impetuous, bounding, ennui-dispelling natures that ever broke in upon a society of ordinary mortals assembled to kill time. "He came upon you," said one who knew him well at this period, "like a wolf in the night." The simile is a splendid one, and it agrees wonderfully with the more subdued representations of his early years given by Goethe himself in his *Autobiography*. Handsome as an Apollo and welcome everywhere, he bore all before him wherever he went; not only by his talent, but also by an exuberance of animal spirits which swept dulness itself along, took away the breath of those who relied on sarcasm and their cool heads, inspired life and animation into the whole circle, and most especially delighted the ladies. This vivacity became even, at times, a reckless humour, prolific in all kinds of mad freaks and extravagances. Whether this impetuosity kept always within the bounds of mere innocent frolic is a question which we need not here raise. Traditions are certainly afloat of terrible domestic incidents connected with Goethe's youth, both in Frankfort and in Weimar; but to what extent these traditions are founded on fact is a matter

which we have never yet seen any attempt to decide upon evidence. More authentic for us, and equally significant, if we could be sure of our ability to appreciate them rightly, are the stories which Goethe himself tells of his various youthful attachments, and the various ways in which they were concluded. In Goethe's own narratives of these affairs, there is a confession of error, arising out of his disposition passionately to abandon himself to the feelings of the moment, without looking forward to the consequences; but whether this confession is to be converted by his critics into the harsher accusation of heartlessness and want of principle, is a thing not to be decided by any general rule as to the matter of inconstancy, but by accurate knowledge in each case of the whole circumstances of that case. One thing these love-romances of Goethe's early life make clear—namely, that for a being of such extreme sensibility as he was, he had a very strong element of self-control. When he gave up Rica or Lilli, it was with tears, and no end of sleepless nights; and yet he gave them up. Shakespeare, we believe (and there is an instance exactly in point in the story of his sonnets), had no such power of breaking clear from connexions which his judgment disapproved. Remorse and return, self-reproaches for his weakness at one moment, followed the next by weakness more abject than before—such, by his own confession, was the conduct, in one such case, of our more passive and gentle-hearted poet. Where Shakespeare was “past cure,” and “frantic-mad with evermore unrest,” Goethe but fell into “hypochondria,” which reason and resolution enabled him to overcome. Goethe at twenty-five gave up a young, beautiful and innocent girl, from the conviction that it was better to do so. Shakespeare at thirty-five was the abject slave of a dark-complexioned woman, who was faithless to him, and whom he cursed in his heart. The sensibilities in the German poet moved from the first, as we have already said, over a firmer basis of permanent character.

It is chiefly, however, the Goethe of later life that the world remembers and thinks of. The bounding impetuosity is then gone; or rather it is kept back and restrained, so as to form a

calm and steady fund of internal energy, capable sometimes of a flash and outbreak, but generally revealing itself only in labour and its fruits. What was formerly the beauty of an Apollo, graceful, light, and full of motion, is now the beauty of a Jupiter, composed, stately, serene. "What a sublime form!" says Eckermann, describing his first interview with him. "I forgot to speak for looking at him: I could not look enough. His face is so powerful and brown! full of wrinkles, and each wrinkle full of expression! And everywhere there is such nobleness and firmness, such repose and greatness! He spoke in a slow composed manner, such as you would expect from an aged monarch." Such is Goethe, as he lasts now in the imagination of the world. Living among statues and books and pictures; daily doing something for his own culture and for that of the world; daily receiving guests and visitors, whom he entertained and instructed with his wise and deep, yet charming and simple converse; daily corresponding with friends and strangers, and giving advice or doing a good turn to some young talent or other—never was such a mind consecrated so perseveringly and exclusively to the service of *Kunst* and *Literatur*. One almost begins to wonder if it was altogether right that an old man should go on, morning after morning, and evening after evening, in such a fashion, talking about art and science and literature, as if they were the only interests in the world; taking his guests into corners to have quiet discussions with them on these subjects; and always finding something new and nice to be said about them. Possibly, indeed, this is the fault of those who have reported him, and who only took notes when the discourse turned on what they considered the proper Goethean themes. But that Goethe far outdid Shakespeare in this conscious dedication of himself to a life of the intellect, we hold to be as certain as the testimony of likelihood can make it. Shakespeare did enjoy his art; it was what, in his pensive hours, as he himself hints, he enjoyed most; and whatever of intellectual ecstasy literary production can bring, must surely have been his in those hours when he composed *Hamlet* and the *Tempest*. But Shakespeare's was precisely one of those

minds whose strength is a revelation to themselves during the moment of its exercise, rather than a chronic ascertained possession; and from this circumstance, as well as from the attested fact of his carelessness as to the fate of his compositions, we can very well conceive that literature and culture and all that formed but a small part of the general system of things in Shakespeare's daily thoughts, and that he would have been absolutely ashamed of himself if, when anything else, from the state of the weather to the quality of the wine, was within the circle of possible allusion, he had said a word about his own plays. If he had not Sir Walter Scott's positive conviction that every man ought to be either a laird or a lawyer, casting in authorship as a mere addition, if it were to be practised at all—he at least led so full and keen a life, and was drawn forth on so many sides by nature, society, and the unseen, that Literature, out of the actual moments in which he was engaged in it, must have seemed to him a mere bagatelle, a mere fantastic echo of not a tithe of life. In his home in London, or his retirement at Stratford, he wrote on and on, because he could not help doing so, and because it was his business and his solace; but no play seemed to him worth a day of the contemporary actions of men, no description worth a single glance at the Thames or at the deer feeding in the forest, no sonnet worth the tear it was made to embalm. Literature was by no means to him, as it was to Goethe, the main interest of life; nor was he a man so far master of himself as ever to be able to behave as if it were so, and to accept, as Goethe did, all that occurred as so much culture. Yet Shakespeare would have understood Goethe; and would have regarded him, almost with envy, as one of those men who, as being “lords and owners of their faces,” and not mere “stewards,” know how to husband Nature's gifts best.

“ They that have power to hurt and will do none,  
That do not do the thing they most do show,  
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,  
Unmovéd, cold, and to temptation slow;  
They rightly do inherit Heaven's graces,  
And husband nature's riches from expense;  
They are the lords and owners of their faces,  
Others but stewards of their excellence.”—*Sonnet 94*.

If Goethe attained this character, however, it was not because, as it is the fashion to say, he was by nature cold, heartless, and impassive, but because, uniting will and wisdom to his wealth of sensibilities, he had disciplined himself into what he was. A heartless man does not diffuse geniality and kindness around him, as Goethe did; and a statue is not seized, as Goethe once was, with hæmorrhage in the night, the result of suppressed grief.

That which made Goethe what he was—namely, his philosophy of life—is to be gathered, in the form of hints, from his various writings and conversations. We present a few important passages here, in what seems their philosophic connexion, as well as the order most suitable for bringing out Goethe's mode of thought in contrast with that of Shakespeare.

*Goethe's Thoughts of Death.*—"We had gone round the thicket, and had turned by Tiefurt into the Weimar road, where we had a view of the setting sun. Goethe was for a while lost in thought; he then said to me, in the words of one of the ancients,

'Untergehend sogar ist's immer dieselbige Sonne.'

(Still it continues the self-same sun, even while it is sinking.)

'At the age of seventy-five,' continued he, with much cheerfulness, 'one must, of course, think sometimes of death. But this thought never gives me the least uneasiness, for I am fully convinced that our spirit is a being of a nature quite indestructible, and that its activity continues from eternity to eternity. It is like the sun, which seems to set only to our earthly eyes, but which, in reality, never sets, but shines on unceasingly.'"—*Eckermann's Conversations of Goethe*, vol. i. p. 161.

*Goethe's maxim with respect to Metaphysics.* "Man is born not to solve the problem of the universe, but to find out where the problem begins and then to restrain himself within the limits of the comprehensible."—*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 272

*Goethe's theory of the intention of the Supernatural with regard to the Visible.*—"After all, what does it all come to? God did not retire to rest after the well known six days of creation; but, on the contrary, is constantly active as on the first. It would have been for Him a poor occupation to compose this heavy world out of simple elements, and to keep it rolling in the sunbeams from year to year, if He had not had the plan of founding a nursery for a world of spirits upon this material basis. So He is now constantly active in higher natures to attract the lower ones."—*Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 426.

*Goethe's doctrine of Immortality.* "Kant has unquestionably done the best service, by drawing the limits beyond which human intellect is not able to penetrate, and leaving at rest the insoluble problems. What a deal have people philosophized about immortality! and how far have they got? I doubt not of our immortality, for nature cannot dispense with the *entelecheia*. But we are not all, in like manner, immortal; and he who would manifest himself in future as a great *entelecheia* must be one now . . . To me the eternal existence of my soul is proved from my idea of activity. If I work on incessantly till my death, nature is bound to give me another form of existence when the present one can no longer sustain my spirit." *Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 193, 194, and p. 122.



*Goethe's image of Life.*—"Child, child, no more! The coursers of Time lashed, as it were, by invisible spirits, hurry on the light car of our destiny; and all that we can do is, in cool self-possession, to hold the reins with a firm hand, and to guide the wheels, now to the left, now to the right, avoiding a stone here, or a precipice there. Whither it is hurrying, who can tell? and who, indeed, can remember the point from which it started?"—*Egmont*.

*Man's proper business.*—"It has at all times been said and repeated, that man should strive to know himself. This is a singular requisition, with which no one complies, or indeed ever will comply. *Man is by all his senses and efforts directed to externals*—to the world around him; and he has to know this so far, and to make it so far serviceable, as he requires for his own ends. It is only when he feels joy or sorrow that he knows anything about himself, and only by joy or sorrow is he instructed what to seek and what to shun."—*Eckermann's Conversations of Goethe*, vol. ii. p. 180.

*The Abstract and the Concrete, the Subjective and the Objective Tendencies.*—"The Germans are certainly strange people. By their deep thoughts and ideas, which they seek in everything, and fix upon everything, they make life much more burdensome than is necessary. Only have the courage to give yourself up to your impressions; allow yourself to be delighted, moved, elevated—nay, instructed and inspired by something great; but do not imagine all is vanity, if it is not abstract thought and idea. . . . It was not in my line, as a poet, to strive to embody anything abstract. I received in my mind impressions, and those of a sensual, animated, charming, varied, hundred-fold kind, just as a lively imagination presented them; and I had, as a poet, nothing more to do than artistically to round off and elaborate such views and impressions, and by means of a lively representation so to bring them forward that others might receive the same impression in hearing or reading my representation of them. . . . A poet deserves not the name while he only speaks out his few subjective feelings; but as soon as he can appropriate to himself and express the world, he is a poet. Then he is inexhaustible, and can be always new; while a subjective nature has soon talked out his little internal material, and is at last ruined by mannerism. People always talk of the study of the ancients; but what does that mean, except that it says, 'Turn your attention to the real world, and try to express it, for that is what the ancients did when they were alive?' Goethe arose and walked to and fro, while I remained seated at the table, as he likes to see me. He stood a moment at the stove, and then, like one who has reflected, came to me, and, with his finger on his lips, said to me, 'I will now tell you something which you will often find confirmed in your own experience. All eras in a state of decline and dissolution are subjective; on the other hand, all progressive eras have an objective tendency. Our present time is retrograde, for it is subjective; we see this not merely in poetry, but also in painting, and much besides. Every healthy effort, on the contrary, is directed from the inward to the outward world, as you will see in all great eras, which have been really in a state of progression, and all of an objective nature.'"—*Ibid.* vol. i. pp. 415, 416, and pp. 283, 284.

*Rule of Individual Activity.*—"The most reasonable way is for every man to follow his own vocation to which he has been born, and which he has learned, and to avoid hindering others from following theirs. Let the shoemaker abide by his last, the peasant by his plough, and let the king know how to govern; for this is also a business which must be learned, and with which no one should meddle who does not understand it."—*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 134.

*Right and Wrong: the habit of Controversy.*—"The end of all opposition is negation, and negation is nothing. If I call *bad* bad, what do I gain? But if I call *good* bad, I do a great deal of mischief. He who will work aright must never rail, must not trouble himself at all about what is ill done, but only do well himself. For the great point is, not to pull down, but to build up, and in this humanity finds pure joy."—*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 208.

*Goethe's own Relation to the Disputes of his time.*—" 'You have been reproached,' remarked I, rather inconsiderately, 'for not taking up arms at that great period (the war with Napoleon), or at least cooperating as a poet.

'Let us leave that point alone, my good friend,' returned Goethe. 'It is an absurd world, which knows not what it wants and which one must allow to have its own way. How could I take up arms without hatred, and how could I hate without youth? If such an emergency had befallen me when twenty years old, I should certainly not have been the last, but it found me as one who had already passed the first sixties. Besides, we cannot all serve our country in the same way, but each does his best, according as God has endowed him. I have toiled hard enough during half a century. I can say that, in those things which nature has appointed for my daily work, I have permitted myself no relaxation night or day, but have always striven, investigated, and done as much, and that as well, as I could. If every one can say the same of himself, it will prove well with all. . . . I will not say what I think. There is more all will towards me, hidden beneath that remark, than you are aware of. I feel therein a new form of the old hatred with which people have persecuted me, and endeavoured quietly to wound me for years. I know very well that I am an eyesore to many, that they would all willingly get rid of me, and that, since they cannot touch my talent, they aim at my character. Now, it is said that I am proud; now, egotistical; now, immersed in sensuality; now, without Christianity; and now, without love for my native country, and my own dear Germans. You have now known me sufficiently for years, and you feel what all that talk is worth. . . . The poet, as a man and citizen, will love his native land, but the native land of his *poetic* powers and *poetic* action is the good, noble, and beautiful, which is confined to no particular province or country, and which he seizes upon and forms, wherever he finds them. Therein he is like the eagle, who hovers with free gaze over whole countries, and to whom it is of no consequence whether the hare on which he pounces is running in Prussia or in Saxony'"—*Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 257, 258, and p. 427.

Whoever has read these sentences attentively, and penetrated their meaning in connexion, will see that they reveal a mode of thought somewhat resembling that which we have attributed to Shakespeare, and yet essentially different from it. Both poets are distinguished by this, that they abstained systematically during their lives from the abstract, the dialectical and the controversial, and devoted themselves, with true feeling and enjoyment, to the concrete, the real and the unquestioned; and so far there is an obvious resemblance between them. But the manner in which this characteristic was attained, was by no means the same in both cases. In Shakespeare, as we have seen, there was a metaphysic longing, a tendency towards the supersensible and invisible, absolutely morbid, if we take ordinary constitutions as the standard of health in this respect; and if, with all this, he revelled with delight and moved with ease and firmness in the sensuous and actual, it was because the very same soul which pressed with such energy and wailing against the bounds of this life of man, was also related with inordinate keenness and intimacy to all that this life spheres in. In Goethe, on the other hand, the tendency to the real existed under easier constitutional

conditions, and in a state of such natural preponderance over any concomitant craving for the metaphysical, that it necessarily took, German as he was, a higher place in his estimate of what is desirable in a human character. That world of the real in which Shakespeare delighted, and which he knew so well, seemed to him, all this knowledge and delight notwithstanding, far more evanescent, far more a mere filmy show, far less considerable a shred of all that is, than it did to Goethe. To Shakespeare, as we have already said, life was but as a little island on the bosom of a boundless sea: men must needs know what the island contains, and act as those who have to till and rule it; still, with that expanse of waters all round in view, and that roar of waters ever in the ear, what can men call themselves or pretend their realm to be? "Poor fools of nature," is the poet's own phrase—the realm so small that it is pitiful to belong to it! Not so with Goethe. To him also, of course, the thought was familiar of a vast region of the supersensible outlying nature and life; but a higher value on the whole was reserved for nature and life, even on the universal scale, by his peculiar habit of conceiving them, not as distinct from the supersensible, and contemporaneously begirt by it, but rather, if we may so speak, as a considerable portion, or even duration, of the *quondam*-supersensible in the new form of the sensible. In other words, Goethe was full of the notion of progress or evolution; the world was to him not a mere spectacle and dominion for the supernatural, but an actual manifestation of the substance of the supernatural itself, on its way through time to new issues. Hence his peculiar notion of immortality; hence his view as to the mere relativeness of the terms right and wrong, good and bad, and the like; and hence also his resolute inculcation of the doctrine, so unpalatable to his countrymen, that men ought to direct their thoughts and efforts to the actual and the outward. Life being the current phase of the universal mystery, the true duty of men could be but to contribute in their various ways to the furtherance of life.

And what then, finally, was Goethe's *own* mode of activity in a life thus defined in his general philosophy? Like Shake-



speare, he was a literary man; his function was literature. Yes, but in what respect, otherwise than Shakespeare had done before him, did he fulfil this literary function in reference to the world he lived in and enjoyed? In the first place, as all know, he differed from Shakespeare in this, that he did not address the world exclusively in the character of a poet. Besides his poetry, properly so called, Goethe has left behind him numerous prose-writings, ranking under very different heads, abounding with such deep and wise maxims and perceptions, in reference to all things under the sun, as would have entitled him, even had he been no poet, to rank as a sage. So great, indeed, is Goethe as a thinker and a critic, that it may very well be disputed whether his prose-writings, as a whole, are not more precious than his poems. But even setting apart this difference, and regarding the two men in their special character as poets or artists, a marked difference is still discernible. Hear Goethe's own definition of his poetical career and aim.

"Thus began that tendency from which I could not deviate my whole life through; namely, the tendency to turn into an image, into a poem, everything that delighted or troubled me, or otherwise occupied me, and to come to some certain understanding with myself upon it, that I might both rectify my conceptions of external things, and set my mind at rest about them. The faculty of doing this was necessary to no one more than to me, for my natural disposition whirled me constantly from one extreme to the other. All, therefore, that has been put forth by me, consists of fragments of a great confession."—*Autobiography*, vol. i. p. 240.

Shakespeare's genius we defined to be the genius of universal expression; of clothing objects, circumstances, and feelings with magnificent language; of pouring over the image of any given situation, whether suggested from within or from without, an effusion of the richest intellectual matter that could possibly be related to it. Goethe's genius, as here defined by himself, was something different and narrower. It was the genius of translation from the subjective into the objective; of clothing real feelings with fictitious circumstance; of giving happy intellectual form to states of mind, so as to dismiss and throw them off. Let this distinction be sufficiently conceived and developed, and a full idea will be obtained of the exact difference between the literary many-sidedness attributed to Shakespeare and that also attributed to Goethe.

## MILTON'S YOUTH.\*

NEVER surely did a youth leave the academic halls of England more full of fair promise than Milton, when, at the age of twenty-three, he quitted Cambridge to reside at his father's house, amid the quiet beauties of a rural neighbourhood some twenty miles distant from London. Fair in person, with a clear fresh complexion, light brown hair which parted in the middle and fell in curls to his shoulders, clear grey eyes, and a well-knit frame of moderate proportions—there could not have been found a finer picture of pure and ingenuous English youth. And that health and beauty which distinguished his outward appearance, and the effect of which was increased by a voice surpassingly sweet and musical, indicated with perfect truth the qualities of the mind within. Seriousness, studiousness, fondness for flowers and music, fondness also for manly exercises in the open air, courage and resolution of character, combined with the most maiden purity and innocence of life—these were the traits conspicuous in Milton in his early years. Of his accomplishments it is hardly necessary to take particular note. Whatever of learning, of science, or of discipline in logic or philosophy the University at that time could give, he had duly and in the largest measure acquired. No better Greek or Latin scholar probably had the University in that age sent forth; he was proficient in the Hebrew tongue, and in all the other customary aids to a biblical theology; and he could speak and write well in French and Italian. His acquaintance, obtained by independent reading, with the history and with the whole body

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of the literature of ancient and modern nations, was extensive and various. And, as nature had endowed him in no ordinary degree with that most exquisite of her gifts, the ear and the passion for harmony, he had studied music as an art, and had taught himself not only to sing in the society of others, but also to touch the keys for his solitary pleasure.

The instruments which Milton preferred as a musician, were, his biographers tells us, the organ and the bass-viol. This fact seems to us to be not without its significance. Were we to define in one word our impression of the prevailing tone, the characteristic mood and disposition of Milton's mind, even in his early youth, we should say that it consisted in a deep and habitual *seriousness*. We use the word in none of those special and restricted senses that are sometimes given to it. We do not mean that Milton, at the period of his early youth with which we are now concerned, was, or accounted himself as being, a confessed member of that noble party of English Puritans with which he afterwards became allied, and to which he rendered such vast services. True, he himself tells us, in his account of his education, that "care had ever been had of him, with his earliest capacity, not to be negligently trained in the precepts of the Christian religion;" and in the fact that his first tutor, selected for him by his father, was one "Thomas Young, a Puritan of Essex who cut his hair short," there is enough to prove that the formation of his character in youth was aided expressly and purposely by Puritanical influences. But Milton, if ever, in a denominational sense, he could be called a Puritan, (he always wore his hair long, and in other respects did not conform to the usages of the Puritan party,) could hardly, with any propriety, be designated as a Puritan in this sense, at the time when he left college. There is evidence that at this time he had not given so much attention, on his own personal account, to matters of religious doctrine, as he afterwards bestowed. That seriousness of which we speak was, therefore, rather a constitutional seriousness ratified and nourished by rational reflection, than the assumed temper of a sect. "A certain reservedness of natural disposition, and a moral discipline learnt out of the

noblest philosophy"—such, in Milton's own words, were the causes which, apart from his Christian training, would have always kept him, as he believed, above the vices that debase youth. And herein the example of Milton contradicts much that is commonly advanced by way of a theory of the poetical character.

Poets and artists generally, it is held, are and ought to be distinguished by a predominance of sensibility over principle, an excess of what Coleridge called the spiritual over what he called the moral part of man. A nature built on quicksands, an organization of nerve languid or tempestuous with occasion, a soul falling and soaring, now subject to ecstasies and now to remorse—such, it is supposed, and on no small induction of actual instances, is the appropriate constitution of the poet. Mobility, absolute and entire destitution of principle properly so called, capacity for varying the mood indefinitely rather than for retaining and keeping up one moral gesture or resolution through all moods—this, say the theorists, is the essential thing in the structure of the artist. Against the truth of this, however, as a maxim of universal application, the character of Milton, as well as that of Wordsworth after him, is a remarkable protest. Were it possible to place before the theorists all the materials which exist for judging of Milton's personal disposition as a young man, without exhibiting to them at the same time the actual and early proofs of his poetical genius, their conclusion, were they true to their theory, would necessarily be, that the basis of his nature was too solid and immovable, the platform of personal aims and aspirations over which his thoughts moved and had footing, too fixed and firm, to permit that he should have been a poet. Nay, whosoever, even appreciating Milton as a poet, shall come to the investigation of his writings, armed with that preconception of the poetical character which is sure to be derived from an intimacy with the character of Shakespeare, will hardly escape some feeling of the same kind. Seriousness, we repeat, a solemn and even austere demeanour of mind, was the characteristic of Milton even in his youth. And the outward manifestation of this was a life of pure and devout

observance. This is a point that ought not to be avoided or dismissed in mere general language; for he who does not lay stress on this, knows not and loves not Milton. Accept, then, by way of more particular statement, his own remarkable words in justifying himself against an inuendo of one of his adversaries in later life, reflecting on the tenor of his juvenile pursuits and behaviour. "A certain niceness of nature," he says, "an honest haughtiness and self-esteem either of what I was, or what I might be, (which let envy call pride,) and lastly that modesty whereof, though not in the title-page, yet here I may be excused to make some beseeeming profession; all these, uniting the supply of their natural aid together, kept me still above those low descents of mind, beneath which he must deject and plunge himself that can agree to saleable and unlawful prostitutions." Fancy, ye to whom the moral frailty of genius is a consolation, or to whom the association of virtue with youth and Cambridge is a jest—fancy Milton, as this passage from his own pen describes him at the age of twenty-three, returning to his father's house from the university, full of its accomplishments and its honours, an auburn-haired youth beautiful as the Apollo of a northern clime, and that beautiful body the temple of a soul pure and unsoiled! Truly, a son for a mother to take to her arms with joy and pride!

Connected with this austerity of character, discernible in Milton even in his youth, may be noted also, as indeed it is noted in the passage just cited, a haughty yet modest self-esteem, and consciousness of his own powers. Throughout all Milton's works there may be discerned a vein of this noble egotism, this unbashful self-assertion. Frequently, in arguing with an opponent, or in setting forth his own views on any subject of discussion, he passes, by a very slight topical connexion, into an account of himself, his education, his designs, and his relations to the matter in question; and this sometimes so elaborately and at such length, that the impression is as if he said to his readers,—“Besides all my other arguments, take this also as the chief and conclusive argument, that it is *I*, a man of such and such antecedents, and with such and such powers to perform far higher work than you see me

now engaged in, who affirm and maintain this." In his later years Milton evidently believed himself to be, if not the greatest man in England, at least the greatest writer, and one whose *egomet dixi* was entitled to as much force in the intellectual Commonwealth as the decree of a civil magistrate is invested with in the order of civil life. All that he said or wrote was backed in his own consciousness by a sense of the independent importance of the fact, that it was he, Milton, who said or wrote it; and often, after arguing a point for some time on a footing of ostensible equality with his readers, he seems suddenly to stop, retire to the vantage-ground of his own thoughts, and bid his readers follow him thither, if they would see the whole of that authority which his words had failed to express.

Such, we say, is Milton's habit in his later writings. In his early life, of course, the feeling which it shows existed rather as an undefined consciousness of superior power, a tendency silently and with satisfaction to compare his own intellectual measure with that of others, a resolute ambition to be and to do something great. Now we cannot help thinking that it will be found that this particular form of self-esteem goes along with that moral austerity of character which we have alleged to be discernible in Milton even in his youth, rather than with that temperament of varying sensibility which is, according to the general theory, regarded as characteristic of the poet. Men of this latter type, as they vary in the entire mood of their mind, vary also in their estimate of themselves. No permanent consciousness of their own destiny, or of their own worth in comparison with others, belongs to them. In their moods of elevation they are powers to move the world; but while the impulse that has gone forth from them in one of these moods, may be still thrilling its way onward in wider and wider circles through the hearts of myriads they have never seen, they, the fountains of the impulse, the spirit being gone from them, may be sitting alone in the very spot and amid the ashes of their triumph, sunken and dead, despondent and self-accusing. It requires the evidence of positive results, the assurance of other men's

praises, the visible presentation of effects which they cannot but trace to themselves, to convince such men that they are or can do anything. Whatever manifestations of egotism, whatever strokes of self-assertion come from such men, come in the very burst and phrensy of their passing resistlessness. The calm, deliberate, and unshaken knowledge of their own superiority is not theirs. True, Shakespeare, the very type, if rightly understood, of this class of minds, is supposed in his sonnets to have predicted, in the strongest and most deliberate terms, his own immortality as a poet. It could be proved, however, were this the place for such an investigation, that the common interpretation of those passages of the sonnets which are supposed to supply this trait in the character of Shakespeare, is nothing more nor less than a false reading of a very subtle meaning which the critics have missed. Those other passages of the sonnets which breathe an abject melancholy and discontentment with self, which exhibit the poet as "cursing his fate," as "bemoaning his outcast state," as looking about abashedly among his literary contemporaries, envying the "art" of one, and the "scope" of another, and even wishing sometimes that the very features of his face had been different from what they were and like those of some he knew, are, in our opinion, of far greater autobiographic value.

Nothing of this kind is to be found in Milton. As a Christian, indeed, humiliation before God was a duty the meaning of which he knew full well; but as a man moving among other men, he possessed in that moral seriousness and stoic scorn of temptation which characterized him, a spring of ever-present pride, dignifying his whole bearing among his fellows, and at times arousing him to a kingly intolerance. In short, instead of that dissatisfaction with self which we trace as a not unfrequent feeling with Shakespeare, we find in Milton, even in his early youth, a recollection firm and habitual, that he was one of those servants to whom God had entrusted the stewardship of ten talents. In that very sonnet, for example, written on his twenty-third birthday, in which he laments that he had as yet achieved so little, his consolation is, that the power of achievement was still indubitably within him—



“ All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever, in my great Task-Master's eye.”

And what was that special mode of activity to which Milton, still in the bloom and seed-time of his years, had chosen to dedicate the powers of which he was so conscious? He had been destined by his parents for the Church; but this opening into life he had definitively and deliberately abandoned. With equal decision he renounced the profession of the law; and it does not seem to have been long after the conclusion of his career at the university, when he renounced the prospects of professional life altogether. His reasons for this, which are to be gathered from various passages of his writings, seem to have resolved themselves into a jealous concern for his own absolute intellectual freedom. He had determined, as he says, “to lay up, as the best treasure and solace of a good old age, the honest liberty of free speech from his youth;” and neither the Church nor the Bar of England, at the time when he formed that resolution, was a place where he could hope to keep it. For a man so situated, the alternative, then as now, was the practice or profession of literature. To this, therefore, as soon as he was able to come to a decision on the subject, Milton had implicitly, if not avowedly, dedicated himself. To become a great writer, and, above all, a great poet; to teach the English language a new strain and modulation; to elaborate and surrender over to the English nation works that would make it more potent and wise in the age that was passing, and more memorable and lordly in the ages to come—such was the form which Milton's ambition had assumed when, laying aside his student's garb, he went to reside under his father's roof.

Nor was this merely a choice of necessity, the reluctant determination of a young soul, “Church-outed by the prelates,” and disgusted with the chances of the law. Milton, in the Church, would certainly have been such an archbishop, mitred or unmitred, as England has never seen; and the very passage of such a man across the sacred floor would have trampled into timely extinction much that has since sprung



up amongst us to trouble and perplex, and would have modelled the ecclesiasticism of England into a shape that the world might have gazed at, with no truant glance backward to the splendours of the Seven Hills. And, doubtless, even amid the traditions of the law, such a man would have performed the feats of a Samson, albeit of a Samson in chains. An inward prompting, therefore, a love secretly plighted to the Muse, and a sweet comfort and delight in her sole society, which no other allurements, whether of profit or pastime, could equal or diminish,—this, less formally perhaps, but as really as care for his intellectual liberty, or distaste for the established professions of his time, determined Milton's early resolution as to his future way of life. On this point it will be best to quote his own words. "After I had," he says, "for my first years, by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father (whom God recompense!) been exercised to the tongues and some sciences, as my age would suffer, by sundry masters and teachers both at home and at the schools, it was found that, whether ought was imposed upon me by them that had the overlooking, or betaken to of mine own choice, in English or other tongue, prosing or versing, but chiefly this latter, the style, by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live." The meaning of which sentence to a biographer of Milton, is, that Milton, before his three-and-twentieth year, knew himself to be a poet.

He knew this, he says, by "certain vital signs," discernible in what he had already written. What were these "vital signs," these proofs indubitable to Milton that he had the art and faculty of a poet? We need but refer the reader for the answer to those smaller poetical compositions of Milton, both in English and in Latin, which survive as specimens of his earliest muse. Of these, some three or four which happen to be specially dated—such as the *Elegy on the Death of a Fair Infant*, written in 1624, or in the author's seventeenth year; the well-known *Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, written in 1629, when the author was just twenty-one; and the often-quoted *Sonnet on Shakespeare*, written not much later—may be cited as convenient materials from which,

whoever would convince himself minutely of Milton's youthful vocation to poetry rather than to anything else, may derive proofs on that head. Here will be found power of the most rare and beautiful conception, choice of words the most exact and exquisite, the most perfect music and charm of verse. Above all, here will be found that ineffable something—call it imagination or what we will—wherein lies the intimate and ineradicable peculiarity of the poet; the art to work on and on for ever in a purely ideal element, to chase and marshal airy nothings according to a law totally unlike that of rational association, never hastening to a logical end like the school-boy when on errand, but still lingering within the wood like the schoolboy during holiday. This peculiar mental habit, nowhere better described than by Milton himself when he speaks of verse—

“Such as the meeting soul may pierce  
In notes, with many a winding bout  
Of linked sweetness long drawn out,  
With wanton heed and giddy cunning,”

is so characteristic of the poetical disposition, that, though in most of the greatest poets, as, for example, Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare in his dramas, Chaucer, and almost all the ancient Greek poets, it is not observable in any extraordinary degree, chiefly because in them the element of direct reference to human life and its interests had fitting preponderance, yet it may be affirmed that he who, tolerating or admiring these poets, does not relish also such poetry as that of Spenser, Keats, and Shakespeare in his minor pieces, but complains of it as wearisome and sensuous, is wanting in a portion of the genuine poetic taste.

There was but one “vital sign,” the absence of which in Milton could, according to any theory of the poetical character, have begotten doubts in his own mind, or in the minds of his friends, whether poetry was his peculiar and appropriate function. The single source of possible doubt on this head could have been no other than that native austerity of feeling and temper, that real though not formal Puritanism of heart and intellect, which we have noticed as distinguish-

ing Milton from his youth upward. The poet, it is said in these days, when, by psychologizing a man, it is supposed we can tell what course of life he is fit for—the poet ought to be universally sympathetic; he ought to hate nothing, despise nothing. And a notion equivalent to this, though by no means so articulately expressed, was undoubtedly prevalent in Milton's own time. As the Puritans, on the one hand, had set their faces against all those practices of profane singing, dancing, masquing, theatre-going, and the like, in which the preservation of the spirit of the arts was supposed to be involved, so the last party in the world from which the reputed devotees of the arts in those days would have expected a poet to arise, was that of the Puritans. Even in Shakespeare, and much more in Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and other poets of the Elizabethan age, may be traced evidences of an instinctive enmity to that Puritanical mode of thinking which was then on the increase in English society, and in the triumph of which these great minds foresaw the proscription of their craft and their pleasures. When Sir Toby says to Malvolio, "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" and when the Clown adds, "Yes, by Saint Anne, and ginger shall be hot i' the mouth too," it is the Knight and the Clown on the one side, against Malvolio the Puritan on the other. That the defence of the festive in this passage is not borne by more respectable personages than the two who speak, is indeed a kind of indication that Shakespeare's personal feelings with regard to the austere movement which he saw gathering around him, were by no means so deep or bitter as to discompose him; but if his profounder soul could behold such things with serenity, and even pronounce them good, they assuredly met with enough of virulence and invective among his lesser contemporaries. That literary crusade against the Puritans, as canting, sour-visaged, mirth-forbidding, art-abhorring religionists, which came to its height at the time when Butler wrote his *Hudibras*, and Wycherley his plays, was already hot when the wits of King James's days used to assemble, after the theatre, in their favourite

taverns ; and if, sallying out after one of their merry evenings in their most favourite tavern of all, the Mermaid in Bread Street, these assembled poets and dramatists had gone in search of the youth who was likeliest to be the poet of the age then beginning, they certainly would not have gone to that modest residence in the same street where the son of the Puritanic scrivener, then preparing for college, was busy over his books. Nay, if Ben Jonson, the last twenty-nine years of whose life coincided with the first twenty-nine of Milton's, had followed the young student from the house where he was born in Bread Street to his rooms at Cambridge, and had there become acquainted with him and looked over his early poetical exercises, it is probable enough that, while praising them so far, he would have constituted himself the organ of that very opinion as to the requisites of the poetical character which we are now discussing, and declared, in some strong phrase or other, that the youth would have been all the more hopeful as a poet if he had had a little more of the *bon vivant* in his constitution.

This, then, is a point of no little importance ; involving, as it does, the relations of Milton as a poet to the age in which he lived—that splendid age of Puritan mastery in England, which came between the age of Shakespeare and Elizabeth, and the age of Dryden and the second Charles. Milton was *the* poet of that intermediate era ; that his character was such as we have described it, made him only the more truly a representative of all that was then deepest in English society ; and, in inquiring, therefore, in what manner Milton's austerity as a man affected his art as a poet, we are, at the same time, investigating the *rationale* of that remarkable fact in the history of English literature, the interpolation of so original and isolated a development as the Miltonic poems between the inventive luxuriousness of the Elizabethan epoch, and the witty licentiousness that followed the Restoration.

First, then, it was not *humour* that came to the rescue, in Milton's case, to help him out in those respects wherein, according to the theory in question, the strictness and austerity of his own disposition would have injured his capacity to be

a poet. There are and have been men as strict and austere as he, who yet, by means of this quality of humour, have been able to reconcile themselves to much in human life lying far away from, and even far beneath, the sphere of their own practice and conscientious liking. As Pantagruel, the noble and meditative, endured and even loved those immortal companions of his, the boisterous and profane Friar John, and the cowardly and impish Panurge, so these men, remaining themselves with all rigour and punctuality within the limits of sober and exemplary life, are seen extending their regards to the persons and the doings of a whole circle of reprobate Falstaffs, Pistols, Clowns, and Sir Toby Belches. They cannot help it. They may and often do blame themselves for it; they wish that, in their intercourse with the world, they could more habitually turn the austere and judicial side of their character to the scenes and incidents that there present themselves, simply saying of each, "That is right and worthy," or, "That is wrong and unworthy," and treating it accordingly. But they break down in the trial. Suddenly some incident presents itself which is not only right but clumsy, or not only wrong but comic, and straightway the austere side of their character wheels round to the back, and judge, jury, and witnesses are convulsed with untimely laughter. It was by no means so with Milton. As his critics have generally remarked, he had little of humour, properly so called, in his composition. His laughter is the laughter of scorn. With one unvarying judicial look, he confronted the actions of men, and, if ever his tone altered as he uttered his judgments, it was only because something roused him to a pitch of higher passion. Take, as characteristic, the following passage, in which he replies to the taunt of an opponent who had asked where *he*, the antagonist of profane amusements, had procured that knowledge of theatres and their furniture, which certain allusions in one of his books showed him to possess:—

"Since there is such necessity to the hearsay of a tire, a periwig, or a vizard, that plays must have been seen, what difficulty was there in that, when in the colleges so many of the young divines, and those in next aptitude to divinity, have been seen so often upon the stage, writhing and unbending their clergy limbs to all the antic and dishonest gestures of Trinculoes,

buffoons, and bawds; prostituting the shame of that ministry which either they had or were nigh having, to the eyes of courtiers and court ladies, with their grooms and mademoiselles? There, whilst they acted and overacted, among other young scholars, I was a spectator:—they thought themselves gallant men, and I thought them fools; they made sport, and I laughed; they mispronounced, and I disliked; and, to make up the atticism, they were out, and I hissed.”—*Apology for Smectymnusus*.

Who can doubt that to a man, to whom such a scene as this presented itself in a light so different from that in which a Shakespeare would have viewed it, Friar John himself, if encountered in the real world, would have been simply the profane and unendurable wearer of the sacred garb, Falstaff only a foul and grey-haired iniquity, Pistol but a braggart and coward, and Sir Toby Belch but a beastly sot?

That office, however, which humour did not perform for Milton, in his intercourse with the world of past and present things, was in part performed by what he did in large measure possess—intellectual *inquisitiveness*; respect for intellect, its accomplishments, and its rights. If any quality in the actions or writings of other men could have won Milton's favourable regards, even where his moral sense condemned, that quality, we believe, was intellectual greatness, and especially greatness of his own stamp, or marked by any of his own features. Hence that tone of almost pitying admiration which pervades his representation of the ruined Archangel; hence his uniformly respectful references to the great intellects of Paganism and of the Catholic world; and hence, we think, his unbounded, and, so far as we can see, unqualified reverence for Shakespeare. As by the direct exercise of his own intellect, on the one hand, applied to the rational discrimination for himself of what was really wrong from what was only ignorantly reputed to be so, he had kept his mind clear, as Cromwell also did, from many of those sectarian prejudices in the matter of moral observance which were current in his time—justified, for example, his love of music, his liking for natural beauty, his habits of cheerful recreation, his devotion to various literature, and even, most questionable of all, as would then have been thought, his affection for the massy pillars and storied windows of ecclesiastical architecture; so, reflexly, by a recognition of the intellectual liberty of others,

he seems to have distinctly apprehended the fact that there might be legitimate manifestations of intellect of a kind very different from his own. A Falstaff in real life, for example, might have been to Milton the most unendurable of horrors, just as, according to his own confession, a play-acting clergyman was his abomination; and yet, in the pages of his honoured Shakespeare, Sir John as mentor to the Prince, and Parson Hugh Evans as the Welch fairy among the mummers, may have been creations he would con over and very dearly appreciate. And this accounts for the multifarious and unrestricted character of his literary studies. Milton, we believe, was a man whose intellectual inquisitiveness and respect for talent would have led him, in other instances than that of the College theatricals, to see and hear much that his heart derided, to study and know what he would not strictly have wished to imitate. Ovid and Tibullus, for example, contain much that is far from Miltonic; and yet that he read poets of this class with particular pleasure, let the following quotation prove:—

“ I had my time, readers, as others have who have good learning bestowed upon them, to be sent to those places where, the opinion was, it might be soonest attained; and, as the manner is, was not unstudied in those authors which are most commended:—whereof some were grave orators and historians, whose matter methought I loved indeed, but, as my age was, so I understood them; others were the smooth elegiac poets whereof the schools are not scarce, whom, both for the pleasing sound of their numerous writing (which, in imitation, I found most easy, and most agreeable to nature's part in me) and for their matter (which, what it is, there be few who know not), I was so allured to read that no recreation came to me more welcome—for, that it was then those years with me which are excused, though they be least severe, I may be saved the labour to remember ye.”—*Apology for Smectymnus*.

That Milton, then, notwithstanding his natural austerity and seriousness even in youth, was led by his keen appreciation of literary beauty and finish, and especially by his delight in sweet and melodious verse, to read and enjoy the poetry of those writers who are usually quoted as examples of the lusciousness and sensuousness of the poetic nature, and even to prefer them to all others—is specially stated by himself. But let the reader, who may think he sees in this a ground for suspecting that we have assigned too much importance to Milton's personal seriousness of disposition as a cause



affecting his aims and art as a poet, distinctly mark the continuation.

"Whence, having observed them" (the elegiac and love poets) "to account it the chief glory of their wit, in that they were ablest to judge, to praise, and by that could esteem themselves worthiest to love, those high perfections which, under one or other name, they took to celebrate, I thought with myself, by every instinct and presage of nature, (which is not wont to be false,) that what emboldened them to this task might, with such diligence as they used, embolden me, and that what judgment, wit, or elegance was my share would herein best appear, and best value itself, by how much more wisely, and with more love of virtue I should choose (let rude ears be absent!) the object of not unlike praises. For, albeit these thoughts to some will seem virtuous and commendable, to others only pardonable, to a third sort perhaps idle, yet the mentioning of them now will end in serious. Nor blame it, readers, in those years to propose to themselves such a reward as the noblest dispositions above other things in this life have sometimes preferred; whereof not to be sensible, when good and fair in one person meet, argues both a gross and shallow judgment, and withal an ungentle and swainish breast. For, by the firm settling of these persuasions, I became, to my best memory, so much a proficient, that, if I found these authors anywhere speaking unworthy things of themselves, or unchaste of those names which before they had extolled, this effect it wrought in me:—From that time forward, their art I still applauded, but the men I deplored; and, above them all, preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never wrote but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts, without transgression. And long it was not after when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem—that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy."—*Apology for Smectymnus.*

Here, at last, therefore, we have Milton's own judgment on the matter of our inquiry. He had speculated himself on that subject; he had made it a matter of conscious investigation what kind of moral tone and career would best fit a man to be a poet, on the one hand, or would be most likely to frustrate his hopes of writing well, on the other; and his conclusion, as we see, was dead against the "wild oats" theory. Had Ben Jonson, according to our previous fancy, proffered him, out of kindly interest, a touch of that theory, while criticising his juvenile poems, and telling him how he might learn to write better, there would have descended on the lecturer, as sure as fate, a rebuke, though from young lips, that would have made his old face blush. "*He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem.*"—fancy that sentence—an early and often pronounced formula of Milton's, as we may be sure it was—hurled, some

evening, could time and chance have permitted it, into the midst of the assembled Elizabethan wits at the Mermaid! What interruption of the jollity, what mingled uneasiness and resentment, what turning of faces towards the new speaker, what forced laughter to conceal consternation! Only Shakespeare, one thinks, had he been present, would have fixed on the bold youth a mild and approving eye, would have looked round the room thoroughly to observe the whole scene, and, remembering some passages in his own life, would mayhap have had his own thoughts! Certainly, at least, the essence of that wonderful and special development of the literary genius of England, which came between the Elizabethan epoch and the epoch of the Restoration, and which was represented and consummated in Milton himself, consisted in the fact that then there was a temporary protest, and by a man able to make it good, against the theory of "wild oats," as current before and current since. The nearest poet to Milton in this respect, since Milton's time, has undoubtedly been Wordsworth.

## THE THREE DEVILS :

### LUTHER'S, MILTON'S, AND GOETHE'S.\*

LUTHER, Milton, and Goethe: these are three strange names to bring together. It strikes us, however, that the effect will be interesting if we connect these three great names, as having each represented to us the Principle of Evil, and each represented him in a different way. Each of the three has left on record his conception of a great accursed being, incessantly working in human affairs, and whose function it is to produce evil. There is nothing more striking about Luther than the amazing sincerity of his belief in the existence of such an evil being, the great general enemy of mankind, and whose specific object, at that time, it was to resist Luther's movement, and, if possible, "cut his soul out of God's mercy." What Luther's exact conception of this being was, is to be gathered from his life and writings. Again, we have Milton's Satan. And, lastly, we have Goethe's Mephistopheles. Nor is it possible to confound the three, or, for a moment, to mistake the one for the other. They are as unlike as it is possible for three grand conceptions of the same thing to be. It cannot, therefore, but be interesting and profitable to make their peculiarities and their differences a subject of study. Milton's Satan, and Goethe's Mephistopheles, have indeed been frequently contrasted in a vague, antithetic way; for no writer could possibly go through a description of Goethe's Mephistopheles without saying something or other about Milton's Satan. The exposition, however, of the difference between the two has never been sufficiently elaborate; and, besides, it appears to us, that it will have the effect of giving the whole speculation greater

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value and interest if, in addition to Milton's Satan and Goethe's Mephistopheles, we take in Luther's Devil. In this paper, therefore, we shall attempt to expound the difference between Luther's Devil, Milton's Satan, and Goethe's Mephistopheles; and, of course, the way to do this effectively is to expound the three in succession. It is scarcely necessary to premise that here there is to be no theological discussion. All that we propose is, to compare, as we find them, three very striking delineations of the Evil Principle, one of them experimental, the other two poetical.

These last words indicate one respect, in which, it will be perceived, at the outset, that Luther's conception of the Evil Principle on the one hand, and Milton's and Goethe's on the other, are fundamentally distinguishable. All the three, of course, are founded on the Scriptural proposition of the existence of a being whose express function it is to produce evil. Luther, firmly believing every jot and tittle of Scripture, believed the proposition about the Devil also, and so the whole of his experience of evil in himself and others was cast into the shape of a verification of that proposition. Had he started without such a preliminary conception, his experience would have had to encounter the difficulty of expressing itself in some other way; which, it is likely, would not have been nearly so effective, or so Luther-like. Milton, too, borrows the elements of his conception of Satan from Scripture. The Fallen Angel of the Bible is the hero of *Paradise Lost*; and one of the most striking things about this poem is, that in it we see the grand imagination of the poet blazing in the very track of the propositions of the theologian. And, though there can be no doubt that Goethe's Mephistopheles is conceived less in the spirit of Scripture than either Milton's Satan or Luther's Devil, still, even in Mephistopheles we discern the lineaments of the same traditional being. All the three, then, have this in common—that they are founded on the Scriptural proposition of the existence of an accursed being, whose function it is to produce evil, and that, more or less, they adopt the Scriptural account of that being. Still, as we have said, Luther's conception of this being belongs to

one category ; Milton's and Goethe's to another. Luther's is a biographical phenomenon ; Milton's and Goethe's are literary performances. Luther illustrated the Evil Being of Scripture to himself, by means of his personal experience. Whatever resistance he met with ; whatever obstacle to Divine grace he found in his own heart or in external circumstances ; whatever event he saw plainly cast in the way of the progress of the Gospel ; whatever outbreak of a bad or unamiable spirit occurred in the Church ; whatever strange phenomenon of nature wore a malevolent aspect,—out of that he obtained a clearer notion of the Devil. In this way, it might be said, that Luther was all his life gaining a deeper insight into the Devil's character. On the other hand, Milton's Satan and Goethe's Mephistopheles are poetical creations—the one epic, the other dramatic. Borrowing the elements of his conception from Scripture, Milton set himself to the task of describing the ruined archangel as he may be supposed to have existed at that epoch of the creation when he had hardly decided his own function ; as yet warring with the Almighty, or, in pursuit of a gigantic scheme of revenge, travelling from star to star. Poetically assuming the device of the same Scriptural proposition, Goethe set himself to the task of representing the Spirit of Evil as he existed six thousand years later ; no longer gifted with the same powers of locomotion, or struggling for admission into this part of the universe, but plying his understood function in crowded cities and on the minds of individuals.

So far as the mere fact of Milton's making Satan the hero of his epic, or of Goethe's making Mephistopheles a character in his drama, qualifies us to speak of the theological opinions of the one or of the other, we are not entitled to say that either Milton or Goethe believed in a Devil at all, as Luther did. Or, again, it is quite conceivable that Milton might have believed in a Devil as sincerely as Luther did, and that Goethe might have believed in a Devil as sincerely as Luther did, also ; and yet, that, in that case, the Devil which Milton believed in might not have been the Satan of the *Paradise Lost*, and the Devil which Goethe believed in might not have been the Mephistopheles of *Faust*. Of course, we have other

means of knowing whether Milton did actually believe in the existence of the great accursed being whose fall he sings. It is also plain that Goethe's Mephistopheles resembles Luther's Devil more than Milton's Satan does, in this respect—that Mephistopheles is the expression of a great deal of Goethe's actual observation of life and experience in human affairs. Still, neither the fact, on the one hand, that Milton did believe in the existence of the Evil Spirit, nor the fact, on the other, that Mephistopheles is an expression for the aggregate of much profound thinking on the part of Goethe, is of force to obliterate the fundamental distinction between Luther's Devil, as a biographical reality, and Milton's Satan and Goethe's Mephistopheles as two literary performances. If we might risk summing up under the light of this preliminary distinction, perhaps the following would be near the truth:—Luther had as strong a faith as ever man had in the existence and activity of the Evil Spirit of Scripture; he used to recognise the operation of this Spirit in every individual instance of evil as it occurred; he used, moreover, to conceive that this Spirit and he were personal antagonists, and so, just as one man forms to himself a distinct idea of the character of another man to whom he stands in an important relation, Luther came to form to himself a distinct idea of the Devil; and what this idea was it seems possible to find out by examining his writings. Milton, again, chose the Scripture personage, as the hero of an epic poem, and employed his grand imagination in realising the Scripture narrative: we have reason also to know that he did actually believe in the Devil's existence; and it agrees with what we know of Milton's character to suppose that the Devil thus believed in would be pretty much the same magnificent being he has described in his poem—though, on the whole, we should not say that Milton was a man likely to carry about with him, in daily affairs, any constant recognition of the Devil's presence. Lastly, Goethe, adapting, for a different literary effect, the Scriptural and traditional account of the same being, conceived his Mephistopheles. This Mephistopheles, there is no doubt, had a real allegoric meaning with Goethe; he meant him

to typify the Evil Spirit in modern civilization ; but whether Goethe did actually believe in the existence of a supernatural intelligence, whose function it is to produce evil, is a question which no one will take it upon himself to answer, although, if he did, it may be unhesitatingly asserted that this supernatural intelligence cannot have been Mephistopheles.

From all this it appears, that Luther's conception of the Evil Being belongs to one category, Milton's and Goethe's to another. Let us consider, *first*, Milton's Satan, *secondly*, Goethe's Mephistopheles, and *thirdly*, Luther's Devil.

The difficulties which Milton had to overcome in writing his *Paradise Lost* were immense. The gist of these difficulties may be defined as consisting in this, that the poet had at once to represent a supernatural condition of being, and to construct a story. He had to describe the ongoings of angels, and, at the same time, to make one event naturally follow another. It was comparatively easy for Milton to sustain his conception of these superhuman beings as mere objects or phenomena—to represent them flying singly through space like huge black shadows, or standing opposite to each other in hostile battalions ; but to construct a story in which these beings should be the agents, to exhibit these beings thinking, scheming, blundering, in such a way as to produce a likely succession of events, was enormously difficult. The difficulty was to make the course of events correspond with the reputation of the objects. To do this perfectly was literally impossible. It is possible for the human mind to conceive twenty-four great supernatural beings existing together at any given moment in space ; but it is utterly impossible to conceive what would occur among these twenty-four beings during twenty-four hours. The value of time, the amount of history that can be transacted in a given period, depends on the nature and prowess of the beings whose volitions make the chain of events ; and so a lower order of beings can have no idea at what rate things happen in a higher. The mode of causation will be different from that with which they are acquainted.

This is the difficulty with which Milton had to struggle ;



or rather, this is the difficulty with which he did not struggle. He had to construct a narrative; and so, while he represents to us the full stature of his superhuman beings as mere objects or phenomena, he does not attempt to make events follow each other at a higher rate among these beings than they do amongst ourselves, except in the single respect of their being infinitely more powerful physical agents than we are. Whatever feeling of inconsistency is experienced in reading the *Paradise Lost* may be traced, we think, to the fact that the necessities of the story obliged the poet not to attempt to make the rate of causation among these beings as extraordinary as his description of them as phenomena. Such a feeling of inconsistency there is; and yet Milton sustains his flight as nobly as mortal could have done. Throughout the whole poem we see him recollecting his original conception of Satan as an object:—

“ Thus Satan, talking to his nearest mate,  
With head uplift above the waves, and eyes  
That sparkling blazed; his other parts besides,  
Prone on the flood, extended long and large,  
Lay floating many a rood.”

And this is a great thing to have done. If the poet ever flags in his conception of these superhuman beings as objects, it is when he finds it necessary to describe a multitude of them assembled together in some *place*; and his usual device then is to reduce the bulk of the greatest number. This, too, is for the behoof of the story. If it is necessary, for instance, to assemble the angels to deliberate, this must be done in an audience-hall, and the human mind refuses to go beyond certain limits in its conception of what an audience-hall is. Again, the gate of Hell is described, although the Hell of Milton is a mere vague extent of fiery element, which, in strict keeping, could not be described as having a gate. The narrative, however, requires the conception. And so in other cases. Still, consistency of description is well sustained.

Nor is it merely as objects or phenomena that Milton sustains throughout his whole poem a consistent conception of the Angels. He is likewise consistent in his description of them as physical agents. Lofty stature and appearance carry with

them a promise of so much physical power; and hence, in Milton's case, the necessity of finding words and figures capable of expressing modes and powers of mechanical action, on the part of the Angels, as superhuman as the stature and appearance he has given to them. This complicated his difficulties very much. It is quite conceivable that a man should be able to describe the mere appearance of a gigantic being, standing up, as it were, with his back to a wall, and yet utterly break down, and not be able to find words, when he tried to describe this gigantic being stepping forth into colossal activity, and doing some characteristic thing. Milton has overcome the difficulty. His conception of the Angels as physical agents does not fall beneath his conception of them as mere objects. In his description, for instance, in the sixth book, of the Angels tearing up mountains by the roots, and flinging them upon each other, we have strength suggested corresponding to the reputed stature of the beings. In extension of the same remark, we may observe how skilfully Milton has aggrandised and eked out his conception of the superhuman beings he is describing, by endowing them with the power of infinitely swift motion through space. On this point, we offer our readers an observation which they may verify for themselves:—Milton, we are persuaded, had it vaguely in his mind, throughout *Paradise Lost*, that the bounding peculiarity between the human condition of being and the angelic one he is describing is the law of gravitation. We, and all that is cognisable by us, are subject to this law; but creation may be peopled with beings who are not subject to it, and to us these beings are as if they were not. But, whenever one of these beings becomes cognisable by us, he instantly becomes subject to gravitation; and he must resume his own mode of being ere he can be free from its consequences. The Angels were not subject to gravitation; that is to say, they had the means of moving in any direction at will. When they rebelled, and were punished by expulsion from heaven, they did not *fall* out; for, in fact, so far as the description intimates, there existed no planet, no distinct material element towards which they could gravitate. They were *driven* out by a pursuing fire. Then, after their

fall, they had the power of rising upward, of navigating space, of quitting Hell, directing their flight to one glittering planet, alighting on its rotund surface, and then bounding off again, and away to another. A corollary of this fundamental difference between the human condition of being and the angelic would be, that angels are capable of direct vertical action, whereas men are capable mainly of horizontal. An army of men can exist only as a square, or other plane figure, whereas an army of angels can exist as a cube or parallelopiped.

Now, in every thing relating to the physical action of the Angels, even in carrying out this notion of their mode of being, Milton is most consistent. But it was impossible to follow out the superiority of these beings to its whole length. The attempt to do so would have made a narrative impossible. Exalting our conception of these beings as mere objects, or as mere physical agents, as much as he could, it would have been suicidal in the poet to attempt to realise history as it really must be among these beings. No human mind could do it. He had, therefore, except where the notion of physical superiority assisted him, to make events follow each other just as they would in a human narrative. The motives, the reasonings, the misconceptions of these beings,—all that determined the succession of events—he had to make substantially human. The whole narrative, for instance, proceeds on the supposition of these supernatural beings having no higher degree of knowledge than human beings, with equal physical advantages, would have had under similar circumstances. Credit the spirits with a greater degree of insight—credit them even with such a strong conviction of the Divine omnipotence as, in their reputed condition of being, we can hardly conceive them not attaining—and the whole of Milton's story is rendered impossible. The crushing conviction of the Divine omnipotence would have prevented them from rebelling with the alleged motive; or, after having rebelled, it would have prevented them from struggling with the alleged hope. In *Paradise Lost*, the working notion which the devils have about God is exactly that which human beings have when they hope to succeed in a bad enterprise. Otherwise, the poem

could not have been written. Supposing the fallen angels to have had a working notion of the Deity as superhuman as their reputed appearance and physical greatness, the events of the *Paradise Lost* might have happened nevertheless; but the chain of volitions would not have been the same, and it would have been impossible for any human poet to realise the narrative.

These remarks are necessary to prepare us for conceiving the Satan of Milton. Except, as we have said, for an occasional feeling during a perusal of the poem that the style of thinking and speculating about the issue of their enterprise is too meagre and human for a race of beings physically so superhuman, one's astonishment at the consistency of the poet's conceptions is unmitigated throughout. Such keeping is there between one conception and another, such a distinct material grasp had the poet of his whole subject, so little is there of the mystic or the hazy in his descriptions from beginning to end, that it would be quite possible to prefix to the *Paradise Lost* an illustrative diagram exhibiting the universal space in which Milton conceived his beings moving to and fro, divided, as he conceived it, at first into two or three, and afterwards into four tropics or regions. Then his narrative is so clear, that a brief prose version of it would be a history of Satan in the interval between his own fall and the fall of man.

It is to be noted that Milton as a poet proceeds on the Homeric method, and not on the Shakespearian; devoting the whole strength of his genius to the object, not of being discursive and original, not of making profound remarks on every thing as he goes along, but of carrying on a sublime and stately narrative. We should hardly be led to assert, however, that the difference between the epic and the drama lies in this, that the latter may be discursive and reflective, while the former cannot. We can conceive an epic written after the Shakespearian method; that is, one which, while strictly sustaining a narrative, should be profoundly expository in its spirit. Certain it is, however, that Milton wrote after the Homeric method, and did not aim at strewing his

text with luminous original propositions. One consequence of this is, that the way to obtain an idea of Milton's Satan is not to lay hold of specific sayings that fall from his mouth, but to go through his history. Goethe's Mephistopheles, we shall find, on the other hand, reveals himself in the characteristic propositions which he utters. Satan is to be studied by following his progress; Mephistopheles, by attending to his remarks.

In the history of Milton's Satan, it is important to begin at the time of his being an archangel. Before the creation of our world, there existed, according to Milton, a grand race of beings altogether different from what we are. These beings were spirits. They did not lead a planetary existence; they tenanted space, in some strange, and, to us, inconceivable way. Or, rather, they did not tenant all space, but only that upper and illuminated part of infinity called Heaven. For Heaven, in Milton, is not to be considered as a locality, but as a region stretching infinitely out on all sides—an immense extent of continent and kingdom. The infinite darkness, howling and blustering underneath heaven, was Chaos, or Night. What was the exact mode of being of the spirits who lived disseminated through Heaven is unknown to us; but it was social. Moreover, there subsisted, between the multitudinous, far-extending population of spirits, and the Almighty Creator, a relation closer, or, at least, more sensible and immediate, than that which exists between human beings and Him. The best way of expressing this relation in human language is, by the idea of physical nearness. They were God's angels. Pursuing, each individual among them, a life of his own, agreeable to his wishes and his character, yet they all recognised themselves as the Almighty's ministering spirits. At times they were summoned, from following their different occupations in all the ends of Heaven, to assemble near the Divine presence. Among these angels there were degrees and differences. Some were in their very essence and constitution grander and more sublime intelligences than the rest; others, in the course of their long existence, had become noted for their zeal and assiduity. Thus, although

really a race of beings living on their own account as men do, they constituted a hierarchy, and were called Angels.

Among all the vast angelic population, three or four individuals stood pre-eminent and unapproachable. These were the Archangels. Satan was one of these : if not the highest archangel in heaven, he was one of the four highest. After God, he could feel conscious of being the greatest being in the universe. But although the relation between the Deity and the angelic population was so close, that we can only express it by having recourse to the conception of physical nearness, yet, even to the angels the Deity was so shrouded in clouds and mystery, that the highest archangel might proceed on a wrong notion of his character ; and, just as human beings do, might believe the Divine omnipotence as a theological proposition, and yet, in going about his enterprises, might not carry a working consciousness of it along with him. There is something in the exercise of power, in the mere feeling of existence, in the stretching out of a limb, in the resisting of an obstacle, in being active in any way, which generates a conviction that our powers are self-contained, hostile to the recollection of inferiority or accountability. A messenger, employed on his master's business, becomes, in the very act of serving him, forgetful of him. As the feeling of enjoyment in action grows strong, the feeling of a dependent state of being, the feeling of being a messenger, grows weak. Repose and physical weakness are favourable to the recognition of a derived existence ; hence the beauty of the feebleness of old age preceding the approach of death. The feebleness of the body weakens the self-sufficient feeling, and disposes to piety. The young man, rejoicing in his strength, cannot believe that his breath is in his nostrils. In some such way the Archangel fell. Rejoicing in his strength, walking colossal through heaven, gigantic in his conceptions, incessant in his working, ever scheming, ever imagining new enterprises, Satan was in his very nature the most active of God's archangels. He was ever doing some great thing, and ever thirsting for some greater thing to do. And, alas ! his very wisdom became his folly. His notion of



the Deity was higher and grander than that of any other angel: but, then, he was not a contemplative spirit; and his feeling of derived existence grew weak in the glow and excitement of constant occupation. As the feeling of enjoyment in action grew strong, the feeling of being an angel grew weak. Thus the mere duration of his existence had undermined his strength and prepared him for sin. Although the greatest angel in heaven, nay, just because he was such, he was the readiest to fall.

At last an occasion came. When the intimation was made by the Almighty in the congregation of the angels that he had anointed his only-begotten Son King on the holy hill of Zion, the Archangel frowned and became a rebel; not because he had weighed the enterprise to which he was committing himself, but because he was hurried on by the impetus of an overwrought nature. Even had he weighed the enterprise, and found it wanting, he would have been a rebel nevertheless; he would have rushed into ruin on the wheels of his old impulses. He could not have said to himself, "It is useless to rebel, and I will not;" and, if he could, what a hypocrite to have stayed in heaven! No, his revolt was the natural issue of the thoughts to which he had accustomed himself; and his crime lay in having acquired a rebellious constitution, in having pursued action too much, and spurned worship and contemplation. Herein lay the difference between him and the other archangels, Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael.

Satan in his revolt carried a third part of the angels along with him. He had accustomed many of the angels to his mode of thinking. One of the ways in which he gratified his desire for activity had been that of exerting a moral and intellectual influence over the inferior angels. A few of these he had liked to associate with, discoursing with them, and observing how they drank in his ideas. His chief associate, almost his bosom-companion, had been Beelzebub, a princely angel. Moloch, Belial, Mammon, had likewise been admitted to his confidence. These five had constituted a kind of clique in heaven, giving the word to a whole multitude of inferior



angels, all of them resembling their leader, in being fonder of action than of contemplation. Thus, in addition to the mere hankering after action, there had grown up in Satan's mind a love of power. This feeling of its being a glorious thing to be a leader seems to have had much to do with his voluntary sacrifice of happiness. We conceive it to have been voluntary. Foreseeing ever so much misery would not have prevented such a spirit from rebelling. Having a third of the angels away with him in some dark, howling region, where he might rule over them alone, would have seemed, even if he had foreseen it, infinitely preferable to the puny sovereignty of an Archangel in that world of gold and emerald—"Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." Thus we conceive him to have faced the anticipation of the future. It required little persuasion to gain over the kindred spirit of Beelzebub. These two appear to have conceived the enterprise from the beginning in a different light from that in which they represented it to their followers. Happiness with the inferior spirits was a more important consideration than with such spirits as Satan and Beelzebub; and to have hinted the possibility of losing happiness in the enterprise, would have been to terrify them away. Satan and Beelzebub were losing happiness to gain something which they thought better; to the inferior angels nothing could be mentioned that would appear better. Again, the inferior angels, judging from narrower premises, might indulge in enthusiastic expectations, which the greater knowledge of the leaders would prevent them from entertaining. At all events, the effect of the intercourse with the angels was, that a third of their number joined the standard of Satan. Then began the wars in heaven related in the sixth book of the poem.

We have to remark, that Satan's carrying on these wars with the hope of victory is not inconsistent with what we have said, as to the possibility of Satan's not having proceeded on a false calculation. We are apt to imagine these wars as wars between the rebel angels and the armies of God. Now this is true; but it is scarcely the proper idea in the circumstances. How could Satan have hoped for victory in that

case? You can only suppose that he did so by lessening his intellect, by making him a mere blundering Fury, and not a keen, far-seeing Intelligence. But in warring with Michael and his followers he was, until the contrary should be proved, warring merely against his fellow-beings of the same heaven, whose strength he knew and feared not. The idea of physical nearness between the Almighty and the angels confuses us here. Satan had heard the threat which had accompanied the proclamation of the Messiah's sovereignty; but it may have been problematical in his mind whether the way in which God would fulfil the threat would be to make Michael conquer him. So he made war against Michael and his angels. At last, when all Heaven was in confusion, the Divine omnipotence interfered. On the third day the Messiah rode forth in his strength to end the wars, and expel the rebel host from heaven. They fled, driven before his thunder. The crystal wall of heaven opened wide, and the two lips, rolling inward, disclosed a spacious gap yawning into the wasteful deep; the reeling angels saw down, and hung back affrighted; but the terror of the Lord was behind them; headlong they threw themselves from the verge of Heaven into the fathomless abyss, eternal wrath burning after them down through the blackness like a hissing fiery funnel.

And now the Almighty determined to create a new kind of world, and to people it with a race of beings different from that already existing; inferior in the meantime to the angels, but with the power of working themselves up into the angelic mode of being. The Messiah, girt with omnipotence, rode out on this creating errand. Heaven opened her everlasting gates, moving on their golden hinges, and the King of Glory, uplifted on the wings of cherubim, rode on and on into Chaos. At last he stayed his fervid wheels and took the golden compasses in his hand. Centering one point where he stood, he turned the other silently and slowly round through the profound obscurity. Thus were the limits of our Universe marked out—that azure region in which the stars were to shine, and the planets were to wheel. On the huge fragment of Chaos thus marked out, the creating spirit

brooded, and the light gushed down. In six days the work of creation was completed. In the centre of the azure universe hung a silvery star. That was the Earth. Thereon in a paradise of trees and flowers walked Adam and Eve, the last and the fairest of all God's creatures.

Meanwhile the rebel host lay rolling in the fiery gulf underneath Chaos. The bottom of Chaos was Hell. Above it was Chaos proper, a thick, black, sweltering element. Above it again was the new experimental world, cut out of it like a mine, and brilliant with stars and galaxies. And high over all, behind the stars and galaxies, was Heaven itself. Satan and his crew lay rolling in Hell, the fiery element underneath Chaos. Chaos lay between them and the new world. Satan was the first to awake out of stupor and realise the whole state of the case; what had occurred, what was to be their future condition of being, and what remained to be attempted. In the first dialogue between him and Beelzebub we see that, even thus early, he had ascertained what his function was to be for the future, and decided in what precise mode of being he could make his existence most pungent and perceptible.

"Of this be sure,  
To do aught good never will be our task,  
But ever to do evil our sole delight,  
As being the contrary to His high will  
Whom we resist."

Here the ruined Archangel first strikes out the idea of existing for ever after as the Devil. It is important to observe that his becoming a devil was not the mere inevitable consequence of his being a ruined archangel. Beelzebub, for instance, could see in the future nothing but a prospect of continued suffering, until Satan communicated to him his conception of a way of enjoying action in the midst of suffering. Again, some of the angels appear to have been ruminating the possibility of retrieving their former condition by patient enduring. The gigantic scheme of becoming a devil was Satan's. At first it existed in his mind only as a vague perception, that the way in which he would be most likely to get the worth out of his existence, was to employ himself thenceforward in doing evil. The idea afterwards became more definite. After glancing

round their new domain, Beelzebub and he aroused their abject followers. In the speech which Satan addresses to them after they had all mustered in order, we find him hint an opening into a new career, as if the idea had just occurred to him :—

“ Space may produce new worlds ; whereof so rife  
There went a fame in heaven that He ere long  
Intended to create, and therein plant  
A generation whom His choice regard  
Should favour equal to the sons of heaven.  
Thither, if but to pry, shall be perhaps  
Our first eruption.”

Here is an advance in definiteness upon the first proposal ; that, namely, of determining to spend the rest of existence in doing evil. Casting about in his mind, as it were, for some specific opening, Satan had recollected the talk they used to have in Heaven about the new world that was to be cut out of Chaos, and the new race of beings that was to be created to inhabit it ; and it instantly struck his scheming fancy that *this* would be the weak point of the universe. If he could but insert the wedge here ! He did not, however, announce the scheme fully at the moment, but went on thinking. In the council of gods which was summoned, some advised one thing, some another. Moloch was for open war ; Belial had great faith in the force of circumstances ; and Mammon was for organising their new kingdom, so as to make it as comfortable as possible. No one, however, could say the exact thing that was wanted. At last Beelzebub, prompted by Satan, rose and detailed the project of their great leader :—

“ There is a place  
(If ancient and prophetic fame in heaven  
Err not), another world, the happy seat  
Of some new race call'd Man, about this time  
To be created like to us, though less  
In power and excellence, but favour'd more  
Of Him who rules above. So was His will  
Pronounced among the gods, and by an oath  
That shook heaven's whole circumference confirm'd.  
Thither let us bend all our thoughts and learn  
What creatures there inhabit, of what mould,  
Or substance, how endued, and what their power  
And where their weakness : how attempted best ;  
By force or subtlety.”

This was Satan's scheme. The more he had thought on it the more did it recommend itself to him. It was more feasible

than any other. It held out an indefinite prospect of action. Moreover, it would be adding another fragment of the universe to Satan's kingdom, mingling and confounding the new world with Hell, and dragging down the new race of beings to share the perdition of the old. The scheme was universally applauded by the angels; who seem to have differed from their leaders in this, that they were sanguine of being able to better their condition, whereas their leaders sought only the gratification of their desire of action.

The question next was, Who would venture out of Hell to explore the way to the new world? Satan volunteered the perilous excursion. Immediately putting on his swiftest wings, he directs his solitary flight towards Hell-gate, where sat Sin and Death. When, at length, the gate was opened to give him exit, it was like a huge furnace-mouth, vomiting forth smoke and flames into the womb of Chaos. Issuing thence, Satan spread his sail-broad wings for flight, and began his toilsome way upward, half on foot, half on wing, swimming, sinking, wading, climbing, flying, through the thick and turbid element. At last he emerged out of Chaos into the light of the new Universe. Winging leisurely now through the balmy ether, he looked upward to the deep soft azure powdered with stars. Upward and upward still he flew, till, high in the distance, he discerned his former home with its opal towers and sapphire battlements, and, hanging thence by a golden chain, our little world, with the moon by her side.

When Satan arrived in the new creation, the whole phenomenon was strange to him, and he had no idea what kind of a being Man was. He asked Uriel, whom he found there fulfilling some Divine errand, in which of all the shining orbs round him Man had his fixed seat; or whether he had a fixed seat at all, and was not at liberty to shift his residence, and dwell now in one star, now in another. Uriel, deceived by the appearance which Satan had assumed, points out the way to Paradise.

Alighting on the surface of the new world, Satan walks about immersed in thought. Heaven's gate was in view. Overhead and round him were the quiet hills and the green

fields. Oh, what an errand he had come upon! His thoughts were sad and noble. Fallen as he was, all the Archangel stirred within him. Oh, had he not been made so high, he should never have fallen so low! Is there no hope even now, no room for repentance? Such were his first thoughts. But he roused himself and shook them off. "The past is gone and away; it is to the future that I must look. Perish the days of my Archangelship! perish the name of Archangel! Such is my name no longer. My future, if less happy, shall be more glorious. Ah, and this is the world I have singled out for my experiment! Formerly, in the days of my archangelship, I ranged at will through infinity, doing one thing here and another there. Now I must contract the sphere of my activity, and labour nowhere but here. But it is better to apply myself to the task of thoroughly impregnating one point of space with my presence than to go flapping my wings vaguely all through the universe. Ah, but may not my nature suffer by the change? In thus selecting a specific aim, in thus concerning myself exclusively with one point of space, and forswearing all interest in the innumerable glorious things that may be happening out of it, shall I not run the risk of degenerating into a smaller and meaner being? In the course of ages of dealing with the puny offspring of these new beings, may I not dwindle down into a mere pungent, pettifogging spirit? What would Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael say, were they to see their old co-mate changed into such a being? But be it so. If I cannot cope with the Almighty on the grand scale of infinity, I shall, at least, make my existence felt by opposing his plans respecting this new race of beings. Besides, by beginning with this, I may worm my way to a more effective position in the universe. At all events, I shall have a scheme on hand, and be incessantly occupied. And, as time makes the occupation more congenial, if I do become less magnanimous, I shall, at the same time, become happier. And, whether my fears on this point are visionary or not, it will, at least, be a noble thing to have it to say that I have raised a whirlpool that shall suck down generation after generation of these new beings, before their Maker's eyes, into the same

wretched condition of being to which He has doomed us. It will be something so to vitiate the universe, that, let Him create, create on as he chooses, it may be like pouring water into a broken vessel."

In the very course of this train of thinking, Satan begins to degenerate into a meaner being. He is on the very threshold of that career, on which having fully entered, he will cease for ever to be the Archangel and become irrevocably the Devil. The very manner in which he tempts our first parents is devil-like. It is in the shape of a cormorant on a tree that he sits watching his victims. He sat at the ear of Eve, "squat like a toad." It was in the shape of a serpent that he tempted her. And when the evil was done, he slunk away through the brushwood. In the very act of ruining man he committed himself to a life of ignominious activity,—he was to go on his belly and eat dust all his days.

Such is the story of Milton's Satan. It will be easy to express more precisely the idea which we have acquired of him, when we come to contrast him with Goethe's Mephistopheles. Meanwhile, with regard to Goethe's Mephistopheles, we shall be much assisted in our efforts to conceive him by keeping in mind what we have been saying about Satan.

We do not think it possible to sum up, in a single expression, all that Goethe meant to signify by his Mephistopheles. For one thing, it is questionable whether Goethe kept strictly working out one specific meaning, and making it clearer all through Mephistopheles's gambols and devilries; or whether, having, once for all, allegorised the Spirit of Evil into a living personage, he did not treat him just as he would have any other of his characters, making him always consistent, always diabolic, but nowise intent upon making his actions run parallel to any under-current of exposition. The way to proceed, therefore, is to treat Mephistopheles as a character in a drama, which we wish to study. Now it strikes us that we shall be on the right track if, in the first place, we establish a relation between Satan and Mephistopheles, by adopting the notion which we have imagined Satan himself



entertained when engaged in scheming out his future life, and supposing Mephistopheles to be what Satan has become in six thousand years. Milton's Satan, then, is the ruined Archangel deciding his future function, and forswearing all interest in other regions of the universe, in order that he might more thoroughly possess and impregnate this. Goethe's Mephistopheles is this same being after the toils and vicissitudes of six thousand years in his new vocation; smaller, meaner, ignobler, but a million times sharper and cleverer. As a kind of corroboration of this view, we may refer, in passing, to the Satan of the *Paradise Regained*; who, though still a sublime and Miltonic being, dealing in high thoughts and high arguments, yet seems to betray, in his demeanour, the effects of four thousand years spent in a new walk. Is there not something Mephistopheles-like, for instance, in the description of the fiend's appearance when he approached Christ to begin his temptation? Christ was walking alone and thoughtful one evening in the thick of the forest where he had lived fasting forty days, when he heard the dry twigs behind him snapping beneath approaching footsteps. He turned round, and

“ An aged man in rural weeds,  
Following as seem'd the quest of some stray ewe,  
Or wither'd sticks to gather, which might serve  
Against a winter's day when winds blow keen  
To warm him, wet return'd from field at eve,  
He saw approach; who first with curious eye  
Perused him, then with words thus utter'd spake.”

Observe how all the particulars of this description are drawn, as it were, out of the very thick of the civilization of the past four thousand years, and how the whole effect of the picture is to suggest a Mephistophelic-looking man, whom it would be disagreeable to meet alone. In fact, if we had space, we could make more use of the *Paradise Regained*, as exhibiting the transition of Satan into Mephistopheles. But we must pass at once to Goethe.

Viewing Mephistopheles in the proposed light (of course we do not pretend that Goethe himself had any such idea about his Mephistopheles), a great deal of insight is to be derived from the “Prologue in Heaven.” For here we have Mephistopheles out of his element, and contrasted with his old co-equals. The

scene is Miltonic. The heavenly hosts are assembled round the throne, and the three Archangels, Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael, come forward to praise the Lord. The theme of their song is Creation ; not, as it would have been in Milton, as an event about to take place, and which would vary the monotony of the universe, but as a thing existing and grandly going on. It is to be noted, too, that while Milton appeals chiefly to the sight, and is clear and coherent in his imagery, Goethe produces a similar effect in his own manner by appealing to sight and hearing simultaneously, making sounds and metaphors dance and whirl through each other as in a wild, indistinct, but overpowering dream. Raphael describes the Sun rolling on in thunder through the heavens, singing in chorus with the kindred stars. Gabriel describes the Earth revolving on its axis, one hemisphere glittering in the light, the other dipped in shadow. Michael in continuation sings of the ensphering atmosphere and the storms that rage in it, darting forth tongues of lightning, and howling in gusts over land and sea. And then the three burst forth in symphony, exulting in their nature as beings deriving strength from serene contemplation, and proclaiming all God's works to be as bright and glorious as on the day they were created. Suddenly, while Heaven is still thrilling to the grand undulation, another voice breaks in :

“ Da du, O Herr, dich einmal wieder nahst,  
 Und fragst wie alles sich bei uns befinde,  
 Und du mich sonst gewöhnlich gerne sahst ;  
 So siehst du mich auch unter dem Gesinde.”

Ugh ! what a discord ! The tone, the voice, the words, the very metre, so horribly out of tune with what had gone before ! Mephistopheles is the speaker. He has been standing behind, looking about him and listening with a sarcastic air to the song of the Archangels ; and when they have done he thinks it his turn to speak, and immediately begins. (We give the passage in translation).

“ Since thou, O Lord, approachest us once more,  
 And askest how affairs with us are going,  
 And commonly hast seen me here before,  
 To this my presence 'mid these Gents is owing.

Excuse my plainness ; I'm no hand at chaffing ;  
 I *can't* talk fine, though all around should scorn ;  
*My* pathos certainly would set thee laughing.  
 Hadst thou not laughter long ago forborne.  
 Of suns and worlds deuce one word can *I* gabble,  
 I only know how men grow miserable,  
 The little God of Earth is still the same old clay,  
 And is as odd this hour as on Creation's day.  
 Better somewhat his situation  
 Hadst thou not given him that same light of inspiration,  
 Reason he calls 't and uses 't so that he  
 Grows but more beastly than the beasts to be ;  
 He seems to me, begging your Grace's pardon,  
 Like one of those long-legg'd things in a garden,  
 That fly about and hop and spring  
 And in the grass the same old chirrup sing.  
 Would I could say that here the story closes !  
 But in each filthy mess they thrust their noses."

And so shameless, and at the same time so voluble is he, that he would go on longer in the same strain did not the Lord interrupt him.

Now this speech both announces and exhibits Mephistopheles's nature. Without even knowing German, one could hardly hear the original read as Mephistopheles's without seeing in it shamelessness, impudence, volubility, cleverness ; a sneering, sarcastic disposition ; want of heart, want of sentiment, want of earnestness, want of purpose ; complete, confirmed, irrevocable devilishness. And besides, Mephistopheles candidly describes himself in it. When, in sly and sarcastic allusion to the song of the Archangel, he tells that *he* has not the gift of talking fine, he announces in effect that he is not going to be Miltonic. He is not going to speak of suns and universes, he says. Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael, are at home in that sort of thing ; but *he* is not. Leaving them, therefore, to tell how the universe is flourishing on the grand scale, and how the suns and the planets are going on as beautifully as ever, he will just say a word or two as to how human nature is getting on down yonder ; and, to be sure, if comparison be the order of the day, the little godkin, Man, is quite as odd as on the day he was made. And forthwith, with astounding impudence, he launches into a train of remark, the purport of which is that every thing down below is at sixes and sevens, and that in his opinion human nature has turned out a failure. And, heedless of the disgust of his

audience, he would go on talking for ever, were he not interrupted.

And is this the Satan of the *Paradise Lost*? Is this the Archangel ruined? Is this the being who warred against the Almighty, who lay floating many a rood, who shot upwards like a pyramid of fire, who navigated space wherever he chose, speeding on his errands from star to star, and who finally conceived the gigantic scheme of assaulting the universe where it was weakest, and impregnating the new creation with the venom of his spirit? Yes, it is he; but oh, how changed! For six thousand years he has been pursuing the walk he struck out at the beginning, plying his self-selected function, dabbling devilishly in human nature, and abjuring all interest in the grander physics; and the consequence is, as he himself anticipated, that his nature, once great and magnificent, has become small, virulent, and shrunken,

“Subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.”

As if he had been journeying through a wilderness of scorching sand, all that was left of the Archangel has long since evaporated. He is now a dry, cold, shrivelled-up, scoffing spirit. When, at the moment of scheming out his future existence and determining to become a Devil, he anticipated the ruin of his nature, he could not help thinking with what a strange feeling he should then appear before his old co-equals, Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael. But now he stands before them disgustingly unabashed, almost ostentatious of not being any longer an Archangel. Even in the days of his glory he was different from them. They luxuriated in contemplation; he in the feeling of innate all-sufficient vigour. And lo, now! They are unchanged, the servants of the Lord, revering the day's gentle going. He, the scheming, enthusiastic Archangel, has been soured and civilised into the clever cold-hearted Mephistopheles.

Mephistopheles is the Spirit of Evil in modern society. Goethe's *Faust* is an illustration of this spirit's working in the history of an individual. The case selected is a noble one.

Faust, a man of grand and restless nature, is aspiring after universality of feeling. Utterly dissatisfied and disgusted with all human method and all human acquisition, nay, fretting at the constitution of human nature itself, he longs to spill out his soul, so that, mingling with the winds, it may become a part of the ever-thrilling spirit of the universe and know the essence of everything. He has been contemplating suicide. To this grand nature struggling with itself Mephistopheles is linked. It is to be noted that throughout the whole drama there is no evidence of its being an object of very earnest solicitude with Mephistopheles to gain possession of the soul of Faust. Of course, he desired this, and had it in view. Thus, he exacted a bond from Faust; and we find him also now and then chuckling when alone in anticipation of Faust's ultimate ruin. But on the whole he is constant to no earnest plan for effecting it. In fact, he is constant to no single purpose whatever. The desire of doing devilry is his motive all through. Going about with Faust was just being in the way of business, and having a companion at the same time. He studies his own gratification, not Faust's, in all that he does. Faust never gets what he had a right to expect from him. He is dragged hither and thither through scenes he has no anxiety to be in, merely that Mephistopheles may enjoy some new and *piquant* piece of devilry. The moment he and Faust enter any place, he quits Faust's side and mixes with the persons present, to do some mischief or other; and, when it is done, he comes back to Faust, who has been standing, with his arms folded, gloomily looking on, and asks him if he could desire any better amusement than this. Now this is not the conduct of a devil intent upon nothing so much as gaining possession of the soul of his victim. A Miltonic devil would have pressed on to the mark more. He would have been more self-denying, and would have kept his victim in better humour. But Mephistopheles is a devil to the very core. He is a devil in his conduct to Faust. What he studies is not to gratify Faust, but to find plenty of congenial occupation for himself; to perpetrate as great a quantity of evil as possible in as short a time as

possible. It seems capable of being inferred from this peculiarity in the character of Mephistopheles, that Goethe had in his mind all through the poem a certain under-current of allegoric meaning. One sees that Mephistopheles, though acting as a dramatic personage, represents an abstract something or other.

The character of Mephistopheles is brought out all through the drama. In the first and second parts we have Faust and him brought into a great variety of situations and into contact with a great variety of individuals; and in watching how Mephistopheles conducts himself in these we obtain more and more insight into his devilish nature. He manifests himself in two ways—by his style of speaking, and by his style of acting. That is to say, Mephistopheles, in the first place, has a habit of making observations upon all subjects, and throwing out all kinds of general propositions in the course of his conversation, and by attending to the spirit of these one can perceive very distinctly his mode of looking at things; and, in the second place, he acts a part in the drama, and this part, is, of course, characteristic.

The distinguishing feature in Mephistopheles's conversation is the amazing intimacy which it displays with all the conceivable ways in which crime can be perpetrated. There is positively not a wrong thing that people are in the habit of doing that he does not seem to be aware of. He is profound in his acquaintance with iniquity. If there is a pin loose anywhere in society, he knows of it; if the affairs of the State are going into confusion, owing to some blockhead's mismanagement, he knows of it. He is versed in all the forms of professional quackery. He knows how pedants hoodwink people, how priests act the hypocrite, how physicians act the rake, how lawyers peculate. In all sorts of police information he is a perfect Fouché. He has gone deep enough into the subject to be able to write a book equal to Duchatelet's. And not only has he accumulated a mass of observations, but he has generalised those observations, and marked evil in its grand educational sources. If the human mind be going out into a hopeless track of speculation, he has observed and

knows it. If the universities be frittering away the intellect of the youth of a country in useless and barren studies, he knows it. If atheistic politicians are vehemently defending the religious institutions of a country, he has marked the prognostication. Whatever promises to inflict misery, to lead people astray, to break up beneficial alliances, to make men flounder on in error, to cause them to die blaspheming at the last, he is thoroughly cognisant of it all. He could draw up a catalogue of social vices. He could point out the specific existing grievances to which the disorganisation of a people is owing, and lay his finger on the exact parent evils which the philanthropist ought to exert himself in exposing and making away with. But here lies the diabolical peculiarity of his knowledge. It is not in the spirit of a philanthropist that he has accumulated his information ; it is in the spirit of a devil. It is not with the benevolent motive of a Duchatelet that he has descended into the lurking-places of iniquity ; it is because he delights in knowing the whole extent of human misery. The doing of evil being his function, it is but natural that he should have a taste for going into the details of his own profession. Nay more, as the Spirit of all evil, who had been working from the beginning, how could he fail to be acquainted with all the existing varieties of criminal occupation ? It is but as if he kept a diary. Now, in this combination of the knowledge of evil, with the desire of producing it, lies the very essence of his character. The combination is horrible, unnatural, unhuman. Generally the motive to investigate deeply into what is wrong is the desire to rectify it ; and it is rarely that profligates possess very valuable information. But in every one of Mephistopheles's speeches there is some profound glimpse into the rottenness of society, some masterly specification of an evil that ought to be rooted out ; and yet there is not one of those speeches in which the language is not flippant and sarcastic, not one in which the tone is sorrowful or philanthropic. Everything is going wrong in the world ; twaddle and quackery everywhere abounding ; nothing to be seen under the sun but hypocritical priests, sharking attorneys, unfaithful wives, children crying for bread to eat,



men and women cheating, robbing, murdering each other! Hurrah! This is exactly a burst of Mephistophelic feeling. In fact it is an intellectual defect in Mephistopheles, that his having such an eye for evil and his taking such an interest in it, prevent his allowing anything for good in his calculations. To Mephistopheles the world seems going to perdition as fast as it can; while in the same universal confusion, beings like the Archangels recognise the good struggling with the evil.

Respecting the part which Mephistopheles performs in the drama we have already said something. Going about the world, linked to Faust, is to him only a racy way of acting the devil. Having as his companion a man so flighty in his notions would increase the flavour of whatever he engaged in. All through he is laughing in his sleeve at Faust, and deriving a keen enjoyment from his transcendental style of thinking. Faust's noble qualities are all Greek and Gaelic to his cold and devilish nature. He has a contempt for all strong feeling, all sentiment, all evangelism. He enjoys the Miltonic vastly. Thus in the "Prologue in Heaven" he quizzes the archangels about the grandiloquence of their song. Not that he does not understand that sort of thing intellectually, but that it is not in his nature to sympathise with anything like sentiment. Hence, when he assumes the sentimental himself and mimicks any lofty strain, although he does it full justice in as far as giving the whole intellectual extent of meaning is concerned, yet he always does so in words so inappropriate emotionally that the effect is a parody. He must have found amusement enough in Faust's company to have reconciled him in some measure to losing him finally.

But to go on. Mephistopheles acts the devil all through. In the first place he acts the devil to Faust himself, for he is continually taking his own way and starting difficulties whenever Faust proposes anything. Then again in his conduct towards the other principal personages of the drama it is the same. In the murder of poor Margaret, her mother, her child, and her brother, we have as fiendish a series of acts as devil could be supposed capable of perpetrating. And lastly, in the mere filling up and side play, it is the same. He is

constantly doing unnecessary mischief. If he enters Auerbach's wine-cellar and introduces himself to the four drinking companions, it is to set the poor brutes fighting and make them cut off each other's noses. If he spends a few minutes in talk with Martha, it is to make the silly old woman expose her foibles. The second part of *Faust* is devilry all through, a tissue of bewilderments and devilries. And while doing all this Mephistopheles is still the same cold, self-possessed, sarcastic being. If he exhibit any emotion at all, it is a kind of devilish anger. Perhaps, too, once or twice we recognise something like terror or flurry. But on the whole he is a spirit bereft of feeling. What could indicate the heart of a devil more than his words to *Faust* in the harrowing prison-scene?

"Komm, komm, ich lasse dich mit ihr im Stich."

And now for a word or two describing Milton's Satan and Goethe's Mephistopheles by each other:—Satan is a colossal figure; Mephistopheles an elaborated portrait. Satan is an Archangel scheming his future existence; Mephistopheles is the modern Spirit of evil. Mephistopheles has a distinctly marked physiognomy; Satan has not. Satan has a sympathetic knowledge of good; Mephistopheles knows good only as a phenomenon. Much of what Satan says might be spoken by Raphael; a devilish spirit runs through all that Mephistopheles says. Satan's bad actions are preceded by noble reasonings; Mephistopheles does not reason. Satan's bad actions are followed by compunctious visitings; Mephistopheles never repents. Satan is often "inly racked;" Mephistopheles can feel nothing more noble than disappointment. Satan conducts an enterprise; Mephistopheles enjoys an occupation. Satan has strength of purpose; Mephistopheles is volatile. Satan feels anxiety; Mephistopheles lets things happen. Satan's greatness lies in the vastness of his motives; Mephistopheles's in his intimate acquaintance with everything. Satan has a few sublime conceptions; Mephistopheles has accumulated a mass of observations. Satan declaims; Mephistopheles puts in remarks. Satan is conversant with the moral aspects of things and uses adjectives; Mephistopheles

has a preference for nouns, and uses adjectives only to convey significations which he *knows* to exist. Satan may end in being a devil; Mephistopheles is a devil irrecoverably.

Milton's Satan and Goethe's Mephistopheles are literary performances; and, for what they prove, neither Milton nor Goethe need have believed in a Devil at all. Luther's Devil, on the other hand, was a being recognised by him as actually existing; as existing, we might say, with a vengeance. The strong conviction which Luther had on this point is a feature in his character. The narrative of his life abounds in anecdotes, showing that the Devil with him was no chimera, no mere orthodoxy, no fiction. In every page of his writings we have the word *Teufel*, *Teufel*, repeated again and again. Occasionally there occurs an express dissertation upon the nature and function of the Evil Spirit; and one of the longest chapters in his *Table Talk* is that entitled "The Devil and his Works"—indicating that his conversation with his friends often turned on the subject of Satanic agency. *Teufel* was actually the strongest signification he had; and whenever he was excited to his highest emotional pitch, it came in to assist his utterance at its climax, and give him a correspondingly powerful expression. "This thing I will do," it was common for him to say, "in spite of all who may oppose me; be it duke, emperor, priest, bishop, cardinal, pope, or Devil." Man's heart, he says, is a "Stock, Stein, Eisen, Teufel, hart Herz," ("a stock, stone, iron, Devil, hard heart.") And it was not a mere vague conception he had of this being, such as theology might oblige. On the contrary, he had observed him as a man would his personal enemy; and, in so doing, had formed a great many conclusions respecting his powers and his character. In general, Luther's Devil may be defined as a personification, in the spirit of Scripture, of the resisting medium which Luther had to toil his way through—spiritual fears, passionate uprisings, fainting resolutions within himself; error, weakness, envy in those around him; and without, a whole world howling for his destruction. It is in effect as if Luther had said, "Scripture reveals to me the existence of a great

accursed being, whose function it is to produce evil. It is for me to ascertain the character of this Being whom I, of all men, have to deal with. And how am I to do so except by observing him working? . . . God knows I have not far to go in search of his manifestations." And thus Luther went on filling up the Scriptural proposition with his daily experience. He was constantly gaining a clearer conception of his great personal antagonist, constantly stumbling upon some more concealed trait in the Spirit's character. The Being himself was invisible; but he was walking in the midst of his manifestations. It was as if there were some Being whom we could not see, nor directly in the ordinary way have any intercourse with; but who every morning, before it was light, came and left at our door some exquisite specimen of his workmanship. It would, of course, be difficult under such disadvantages to become acquainted with the character of our invisible correspondent and morning visitant; still we could arrive at a few conclusions respecting him, and the more of his workmanship we saw, the more insight we should come to have. Or again, in striving to realize to himself the Scriptural proposition about the Devil, Luther, to speak in the language of the "Positive Philosophy," was but striving to ascertain the laws according to which evil happens. Only the Positive Philosophy would lay a veto on any such speculation, and pronounce it fundamentally vicious in this respect—that there are not two courses of events, separable from each other, in history, the one good and the other evil, but that evil comes of good and good of evil; so that if we are to have a science of history at all, the least we can have is a science of the laws according to which, not evil follows evil, but events follow each other. But History to Luther was not a physical course of events. It was God acting, and the Devil opposing.

In so far, Luther did not differ from his age. Belief in Satanic agency was universal at that period. We have no idea now how powerful this belief was. We realize something of the truth when we read the depositions in an old book of trials for witchcraft. But it is sufficient to glance over any writings of the period to see what a real

meaning was then attached to the words "Hell" and "Devil." The spirit of these words has become obsolete, chased away by the spirit of exposition. That was what M. Comte calls the Theological Period, when all the phenomena of mind and matter were referred to the agency of Spirits. The going out of the belief in Satanic agency (for even those who retain it in profession allow it no force in practice), M. Comte would attribute to the progress of the spirit of that philosophy of which he is the apostle. We do not think, however, that the mere progress of the scientific spirit—that is, the mere disposition of men to pursue one mode of thinking with respect to all classes of phenomena—could have been sufficient of itself to work such an alteration in the general mind. We are fond of accounting for it, in part at least, by the going out, in the progress of civilization, of those sensations which seem naturally fitted to nourish the belief in supernatural beings. The tendency of civilization has been to diminish our opportunities of feeling terror, of feeling strongly at all. The horrific plays a much less important part in human experience than it once did. To mention but a single instance, we are exempted now, by mechanical contrivances for locomotion, &c., from the necessity of being much in darkness or wild physical solitude. This is especially the case with those who dwell in cities, and therefore exert most conspicuously an intellectual influence. The moaning of the wind at night in winter is about their highest experience of the kind; and is it not a corroboration of the view we are taking, that the belief in the supernatural is always strongest at the moment of this experience? Scenes and situations our ancestors were in every day, are strange to us. We have not now to travel through forests at the dead of night, nor to pass a lonely spot on a moor where a murderer's body is swinging from a gibbet. Tam o' Shanter, even before he came to Allowa' Kirk, saw more than many of us see in a lifetime.

" By this time he was 'cross the ford  
Whaur in the snaw the chapman smoor'd,  
And past the birks and muckle stane  
Whaur drunken Charlie brak's neck bane,

And through the whins and by the cairn  
Whaur hunters fand the murder'd bairn,  
And near the thorn aboon the well  
Whaur Mungo's mither hang'd hersel."

This effect of civilization in reducing all our sensations to those of comfort, we conceive to be really an alarming circumstance, in the point of view under consideration. It is necessary for many a reason to resist the universal application of the "Positive Philosophy," even if we adopt and adore it as an instrument of explication. The "Positive Philosophy" commands us to forbear all speculation into the inexplicable. For the sake of many things this order must be disregarded. Speculation into the essence of things is the invariable accompaniment of strong feeling; and the moral nature of man would starve upon such chopped straw as the mere intellectual relations of similitude and succession. Nor does it meet the demands of the case to say that the "Positive Philosophy" would be always far in arrears of the known phenomena, and that here would be mystery enough. No! the "Positive Philosophy" would require to strike a chasm in itself, under the title of the Liberty of Hypothesis. We do not mean the liberty of hypothesis merely as a means of anticipating theory, but for emotional and imaginative purposes. It is in this light that we would welcome Animal Magnetism, or any thing else whatever that would but knock a hole through the paper wall that encloses our mode of being, snub the self-conceit of our senses, and give us other and more difficult phenomena to explain.

But though Luther and his age were not at variance in the belief in Satanic agency, Luther, of course, did this as he did every thing else, gigantically. The Devil, as Luther conceived him, was not the Satan of Milton; although, had Luther set himself to realize the Miltonic narrative, his conception might not have been dissimilar. But it was as the enemy of mankind, working in human affairs, that Luther conceived the Devil. We should expect his conception therefore to tally with Goethe's in some respects, but only as a conception of Luther's would tally with one of Goethe's. Luther's conception was far truer to the grand Scriptural definition than



either Milton's or Goethe's. Mephistopheles being a character in a drama, and apparently fully occupied in his capacity as such, we cannot bring ourselves to recognise in him that virtually omnipotent being to whom all evil is owing, who is leavening the human mind everywhere, as if the atmosphere round the globe were charged with the venom of his spirit. In the case of Milton's Satan we have no such difficulty, because in his case a whole planet is at stake, and there are only two individuals on it. But Luther's conception met the whole exigency of Scripture. His conception was distinctly that of a being to whose operation all the evil of all times and all places is owing; a veritable *πνεῦμα* diffused through the earth's atmosphere. Hence his mind had to entertain the notion of a plurality of devils; for he could only conceive the Arch-spirit acting corporeally through imps or emanations. Goethe's Mephistopheles might pass for one of these.

It would be possible farther to illustrate Luther's conception of the Evil Principle by presenting a great many of his specific sayings respecting him. It would be found from these that his conception was that of a being to whom evil of all kinds was dear. The Devil with him was a meteorological agent. Devils, he said, are in woods, and waters, and dark poolly places, ready to hurt passers-by; there are devils also in the thick black clouds, who cause hail and thunders and lightnings, and poison the air and the fields and the pastures. "When such things happen, philosophers say they are natural, and ascribe them to the planets, and I know not what all." The Devil he believed also to be the patron of witchcraft. The Devil, he said, had the power of deceiving the senses, so that one should swear he heard or saw something, while really the whole was an illusion. The Devil also was at the bottom of dreaming and somnambulism. He was likewise the author of diseases. "I hold," said Luther, "that the Devil sendeth all heavy diseases and sicknesses upon people." Diseases are, as it were, the Devil striking people; only, in striking, he must use some natural instrument, as a murderer uses a sword. When our sins get the upper hand, and all is going wrong, then the



Devil must be God's hangman, to clear away obstructions and to blast the earth with famines and pestilences. Whatsoever procures death, that is the Devil's trade. All sadness and melancholy come of the Devil. So does insanity; but the Devil has no farther power over the soul of a maniac. The Devil works in the affairs of nations. He looks always upward, taking an interest in what is high and pompous; he does not look downward, taking little interest in what is insignificant and lowly. He likes to work on the great scale; to establish an influence, as it were, over the central minds which manage affairs. The Devil is also a spiritual tempter. He is the opponent of the Divine grace in the hearts of individuals. This was the aspect of the doctrine of Satanic agency which would be most used in preaching; and accordingly Luther's propositions on the point are very specific. He had, as it were, ascertained the laws of Satanic operation upon the human spirit. The Devil, he said, knows Scripture well, and uses it in argument. He shoots fearful thoughts, which are his fiery darts, into the hearts of the godly. The Devil is acquainted even with those mysterious enjoyments, those spiritual excitements, which the Christian would suppose a being like him must be ignorant of. "What gross inexperienced fellows," he says, "are these Papist commentators! They are for interpreting Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' to be merely fleshly lust; because they know no other kind of tribulation than that." But though the Devil has great power over the human mind, he is limited in some respects. He has no means, for instance, of knowing the thoughts of the faithful until they give them utterance. Again, if the Devil be once foiled in argument, he cannot tempt that soul again on the same tack. The Papacy being with Luther the grand existing form of evil, he of course recognised the Devil in it. If the Papacy were once overthrown, Satan would lose his stronghold. Never on earth again would he be able to pile up such another edifice. No wonder, then, that at that moment all the energies of the enraged and despairing Spirit were employed to prop up the reeling and tottering fabric. Necessarily, therefore, Luther and Satan were personal antagonists. Satan saw that

the grand struggle was with Luther. If he could but crush him by physical violence, or make him forget God, then the world would be his own again. So, often did he wrestle with Luther's spirit; often in nightly heart-agonies did he try to shake his faith in Christ. But he was never victorious. "All the Duke Georges in the universe," said Luther, "are not equal to a single devil; and I do not fear the Devil." "I should wish," he said, "to die rather by the Devil's hands than by the hands of Pope or Emperor; for then I should die at all events by the hands of a great and mighty prince of the world; but if I die through him, he shall eat such a bit of me as will be his suffocation; he shall spew me out again; and at the last day, I, in requital, shall devour him." When all other means were unavailing, Luther found that the Devil could not stand against humour. In his hours of spiritual agony, he tells us, when the Devil was heaping up his sins before him, so as to make him doubt if he should be saved, and when he could not drive him away by uttering sentences of Holy Writ, or by prayer, he used to address him thus: "Devil, if, as you say, Christ's blood, which was shed for my sins, be not sufficient to ensure my salvation, can't you pray for me yourself, Devil?" At this, the Devil invariably fled, "*quia est superbus spiritus, et non potest ferre contemptum sui.*"

What with Luther was "wrestling with the Devil," we at this day would call "low spirits." Life must be a much more insipid thing now than it was then. O what a soul that man must have had; under what a weight of feeling, that would have crushed a million of us, *he* must have trod the earth!

joy, of exultation, and of scorn, in what men think and write after it; if it has ended in a defeat, all that is thought and written will be tinged by a deeper and finer sorrow.

The history of English literature affords some curious illustrations of this law. It has always puzzled historians, for example, to account for such a great unoccupied gap in our literary progress as occurs between the death of Chaucer and the middle of the reign of Elizabeth. From the year 1250, when the English language first makes its appearance in anything like its present form, to the year 1400, when Chaucer died, forms, as all know, the infant age of our literature. It was an age of great literary activity; and how much was achieved in it remains apparent in the fact that it culminated in a man like Chaucer—a man whom, without any drawback for the early epoch at which he lived, we still regard as one of our literary princes. Nor was Chaucer the solitary name of his age. He had some notable contemporaries, both in verse and in prose. When we pass from Chaucer's age, however, we have to overleap nearly a hundred and eighty years before we alight upon a period presenting anything like an adequate show of literary continuation. A few smaller names, like those of Lydgate, Surrey, and Skelton, are all that can be cited as poetical representatives of this sterile interval in the literary history of England; whatever of Chaucer's genius still lingered in the island seeming to have travelled northward, and taken refuge in a series of Scottish poets, far excelling any of their English contemporaries. How is this to be accounted for? Is it that really, during this period, there was less of available mind than before in England; that the quality of the English nerve, so to speak, had degenerated? By no means necessarily so. Englishmen, during this period, were engaged in enterprises requiring no small amount of intellectual and moral vigour; and there remain to us, from the same period, specimens of grave and serious prose, which, if we do not place them among the gems of our literature, we at least regard as evidence that our ancestors of those days were men of heart and wit and solid sense. In short, we are driven to suppose that there was something in the social circumstances of England during the

1250-1400  
B. 1275-1300  
1400-1516  
1516-1518

long period in question, which prevented such talent as there was from assuming the particular form of literature. Fully to make out what this "something" was, may baffle us; but when we remember that this was the period of the civil wars of the Roses, and also of the great Anglican Reformation, we have reason enough to conclude that the dearth of pure literature may have been owing, in part, to the engrossing nature of those practical questions which then disturbed English society. When Chaucer wrote, England, under the splendid rule of the third Edward, was potent and triumphant abroad, but large and leisurely at home; but scarcely had that monarch vacated the throne when a series of civil jars began, which tore the nation into factions, and was speedily followed by a religious movement as powerful in its effects. Accordingly, though printing was introduced during this period, and thus Englishmen had greater temptations to write, what they did write was almost exclusively plain grave prose, intended for practical or polemical occasions, and making no figure in a historical retrospect. How different when, passing the controversial reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., and Mary, we come upon the golden days of Queen Bess! Controversy enough remained to give occasion to plenty of polemical prose; but about the middle of her reign, when England, once more great and powerful abroad as in the time of the Edwards, settled down within herself into a new lease of social order and leisure under an ascertained government, there began an outburst of literary genius such as no age or country had ever before witnessed. The literary fecundity of that period of English history which embraces the latter half of the reign of Elizabeth, and the whole of the reign of James I. (1580-1625), is a perpetual astonishment to us all. In the entire preceding three centuries and a half, reckoning from the first use of the English tongue, we can with difficulty name six men that can, by any charity of judgment, be regarded as stars in our literature, and of these only one that is a star of the first magnitude: whereas, in this brief period of forty-five or fifty years, we can reckon up a host of poets and prose-writers all noticeable on high literary grounds,

and of whom at least thirty were men of extraordinary dimensions. Indeed, in the contemplation of the intellectual abundance and variety of this age—the age of Spenser, and Shakespeare, and Bacon, and Raleigh, and Hooker, and Ben Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher, and Donne, and Herbert, and Massinger, and their illustrious contemporaries—we feel ourselves driven from the theory that so rich a literary crop could have resulted from that mere access of social leisure after a long series of national broils to which we do in part attribute it, and are obliged to suppose that there must have been, along with this, an actually finer substance and condition, for the time being, of the national nerve. The very brain of England must have become more “quick, nimble, and forgetive,” before the time of leisure came.

We have spoken of this great age of English literature as terminating with the reign of James I., in 1625. In point of fact, however, it extended some way into the reign of his son, Charles I. Spenser had died in 1599, before James had ascended the English throne; Shakespeare and Beaumont had died in 1616, while James still reigned; Fletcher died in 1625; Bacon died in 1626, when the crown had been but a year on Charles's head. But while these great men and many of their contemporaries had vanished from the scene before England had any experience of the first Charles, some of their peers survived to tell what kind of men they had been. Ben Jonson lived till 1637, and was poet-laureate to Charles I.; Donne and Drayton lived till 1631; Herbert, till 1632; Chapman, till 1634; Dekker, till 1638; Ford, till 1639; and Heywood and Massinger, till 1640.

There is one point in the reign of Charles, however, where a clear line may be drawn separating the last of the Elizabethan giants from their literary successors. This is the point at which the Civil War commences. The whole of the earlier part of Charles's reign was a preparation for this war; but it cannot be said to have fairly begun till the meeting of the Long Parliament in 1640, when Charles had been fifteen years on the throne. If we select this year as the commencement of the great Puritan and Republican Revolu-

*See Appendix, p. 100.*

tion in England, and the year 1660, when Charles II. was restored, as the close of the same Revolution, we shall have a period of twenty years to which, if there is any truth in the notion that the muses shun strife, this notion should be found peculiarly applicable. Is it so? We think it is. In the first place, as we have just said, the last of the Elizabethan giants died off before this period began, as if killed by the mere approach to an atmosphere so lurid and tempestuous. In the second place, in the case of such writers as were old enough to have learnt in the school of these giants and yet young enough to survive them and enter on the period of struggle—as, for example, Herrick (1591–1660), Shirley (1596–1666), Waller (1605–1687), Davenant (1605–1668), Suckling (1608–1643), Milton (1608–1674), Butler (1612–1680), Cleveland (1613–1658), Denham (1615–1668), and Cowley (1618–1667),—it will be found, on examination, either that the time of their literary activity did not coincide with the period of struggle, but came before it, or after it, or lay on both sides of it; or that what they did write of a purely literary character during this period was written in exile; or, lastly, that what they did write at home of a genuine literary character during this period is inconsiderable in quantity, and dashed with a vein of polemical allusion, rendering it hardly an exception to the rule. The literary career of Milton illustrates very strikingly this fact of the all but entire cessation of pure literature in England between 1640 and 1660. Milton's life consists of three distinctly marked periods—the first ending with 1640, during which he composed his exquisite minor poems; the second extending precisely from 1640 to 1660, during which he wrote no poetry at all, except a few sonnets, but produced his various polemical prose treatises or pamphlets, and served the state as a public functionary; and the third, which may be called the period of his later muse, extending from 1660 to his death in 1674, and famous for the composition of his greater poems. Thus Milton's prose-period, if we may so term it, coincided exactly with the period of civil strife and Cromwellian rule. And if this was the case with Milton; if he, who was essentially



the poet of Puritanism, with his whole heart and soul in the struggle which Cromwell led, was obliged, during the process of that struggle, to lay aside his singing robes, postpone his plans of a great immortal poem, and in the meanwhile drudge laboriously as a prose pamphleteer; how much more must those have been reduced to silence or brought down into practical prose, who found no such inspiration in the movement as it gave to the soul of Milton, but regarded it all as desolation and disaster! Indeed, one large department of the national literature at this period was proscribed by civil enactment. Stage-plays were prohibited in 1642, and it was not till after the Restoration that the theatres were reopened. Such a prohibition, though it left the sublime muse of Milton at liberty, had it cared to sing, was a virtual extinction for the time of all the customary literature. In fine, if all the literary produce of England in the interval between 1640 and 1660 is examined, it will be found to consist in the main of a huge mass of controversial prose, by far the greater proportion of which, though effective at the time, is little better now than antiquarian rubbish, astonishing from its bulk, though some small percentage, including all that came from the terrible pen of Milton, is saved, by reason of its strength and grandeur. The intellect of England was as active and as abundant as ever, but it was all required for the current service of the time. The only exception of any consequence was in the case of that singular personage, Sir Thomas Browne, the author of the *Religio Medici*. While all England was in throes and confusion, this mystical, and, with all due respect, somewhat priggish and overrated man, was pottering along his garden at Norwich, pursuing his meditations about sepulchral urns and his inquiries respecting the Quincuncial Lozenge. His views of things would have been considerably improved by a kick, during one of his meditative walks, from the boot of an Ironside.

Had Cromwell lived longer, or had he established a dynasty capable of maintaining itself, there can be little doubt that there would have come a time of leisure during which, even under a Puritan rule, there would have been a new outburst of



English Literature. There were symptoms, towards the close of the Protectorate, that Cromwell, having now "reasonable good leisure," was willing and even anxious that the nation should resume its old literary industry and all its innocent liberties and pleasures. He allowed Cowley, Waller, Denham, Davenant, and other Royalists, to come over from France, and was glad to see them employed in writing verses. Waller became one of his courtiers, and composed panegyrics on him. He released Cleveland from prison in a very handsome manner, considering what hard things the witty roysterer had written about "O.P." and his "copper nose." He appears even to have winked at Davenant, when, in violation of the act against stage-plays, that gentlemanly poet began to give private theatrical entertainments under the name of operas. Davenant's heretical friend, Hobbes, too, already obnoxious by his opinions even to his own political party, availed himself of the liberty of the press to issue some fresh metaphysical essays, which the Protector may have read. In fact, had Cromwell survived a few years, there would, in all probability, have arisen, under his auspices, a new literature, of which his admirer and secretary, Milton, would have been the laureate. What might have been the characteristics of this literature of the Commonwealth, had it developed itself to its full form and proportions, we can but guess. That, in some respects it would not have been so broad and various as the literature which took its rise from the Restoration, is very likely; for, as long as the Puritan element had remained dominant in English society, it is impossible that, with any amount of liberty of the press, there could have been such an outbreak of the merely comic spirit as did occur when that element succumbed to its antagonist, and genius had official licence to be as profligate as it chose. But if less gay and riotous, it might have been more earnest, powerful, and impressive. For its masterpiece it would still have had *Paradise Lost*,—a work which, as it is, we must regard as its peculiar offspring, though posthumously born; nor can we doubt that, if borne up by the example and the recognised supremacy of such a laureate as Milton, the younger literary men of the time would

have found themselves capable of other things than epigrams and farces.

It was fated, however, that the national leisure requisite for a new development of English literary genius, should commence only with the restoration of the Stuarts in 1660; and then it was a leisure secured under very different circumstances from those which would have attended a perpetuation of Cromwell's rule. With Charles II. there came back into the island, after many years of banishment, all the excesses of the cavalier spirit, more reckless than before, and considerably changed by long residence in continental cities, and especially in the French capital. Cavalier noblemen and gentlemen came back, bringing with them French tastes, French fashions, and foreign ladies of pleasure. As Charles II. was a different man from his father, so the courtiers that gathered round him at Whitehall were very different from those who had fought with Charles I. against the Parliamentarians. Their political principles and prejudices were nominally the same, but they were for the most part men of a younger generation, less stiff and English in their demeanour, and more openly dissolute in their morals. Such was the court the restoration of which England virtually confessed to be necessary to prevent a new era of anarchy. It was inaugurated amid the shouts of the multitude; and Puritanism, already much weakened by defections before the event, hastened to disappear from the public stage, diffusing itself once more as a mere element of secret efficacy through the veins of the community, and purchasing even this favour by the sacrifice of its most notorious leaders.

Miserable in some respects as was this change for England, it offered, by reason of the very unanimity with which it was effected, all the conditions necessary for the forthcoming of a new literature. But where were the materials for the commencement of this new literature?

First, as regards *persons* fit to initiate it, there were all those who had been left over from the Protectorate, together with such wits as the Restoration itself had brought back, or called into being. There was the old dramatist, Shirley, now

in his sixty-fifth year, very glad, no doubt, to come back to town, after his hard fare as a country-schoolmaster during the eclipse of the stage, and to resume his former occupation as a writer of plays in the style that had been in fashion thirty years before. There was Hobbes, older still than Shirley, a tough old soul of seventy-three, but with twenty more years of life in him, and, though not exactly a literary man, yet sturdy enough to be whatever he liked within certain limits. There was mild Izaak Walton, of Chancery-lane, only five years younger than Hobbes, but destined to live as long, and capable of writing very nicely if he could have been kept from sauntering into the fields to fish. There was the gentlemanly Waller, now fifty-six years of age, quite ready to be a poet about the court of Charles, and to write panegyrics on the new side to atone for that on Cromwell. There was the no less gentlemanly Davenant, also fifty-six years of age, steady to his royalist principles, as became a man who had received the honour of knighthood from the royal martyr, and enjoying a wide reputation partly from his poetical talents, and partly from his want of nose. There was Milton, in his fifty-third year, blind, desolate, and stern, hiding in obscure lodgings till his defences of regicide should be sufficiently forgotten to save him from molestation, and building up in imagination the scheme of his promised epic. There was Butler, four years younger, brimful of hatred to the Puritans, and already engaged in his poem of *Hudibras*, which was to lash them so much to the popular taste. There was Denham, known as a versifier little inferior to Waller, and with such superior claims on the score of loyalty as to be considered worthy of knighthood and the first vacant post. There was Cowley, still only in his forty-third year, and with a ready-made reputation, both as a poet and a prose-writer, such as none of his contemporaries possessed, and such indeed as no English writer had acquired since the days of Ben Jonson and Donne. Younger still, and with his fame as a satirist not yet made, there was Milton's friend, honest Andrew Marvel, whom the people of Hull had chosen as their representative in Parliament. Had the search been extended

to theologians, and such of them selected as were capable of influencing the literature by the form of their writings, as distinct from their matter, Jeremy Taylor was still alive, though his work was nearly over; Richard Baxter, with a longer life before him, was in the prime of his strength; and there was in Bedford, an eccentric Baptist preacher, once a tinker, who was to be the author, though no one supposed it, of the greatest prose allegory in the language. Close about the person of the king, too, there were able men and wits, capable of writing themselves, or of criticising what was written by others—from the famous counsellor Clarendon, down to such younger and lighter men as Dillon, Earl of Roscommon, Sackville, Earl of Dorset, and Sir Charles Sedley. Lastly, not to extend the list farther, there was then in London, aged twenty-nine, and going about in a stout plain dress of grey drugget, a Northamptonshire squire's son, named John Dryden, who, after having been educated at Cambridge, had come up to town in the last year of the Protectorate to push his fortune under a Puritan relative then in office, and who had already once or twice tried his hand at poetry. Like Waller, he had written and published a series of panegyrical stanzas on Cromwell after his death; and like Waller, also, he had attempted to atone for this miscalculation by writing another poem, called *Astræa Redux*, to celebrate the return of Charles. As a taste of what this poet, in particular, could do, take the last of his stanzas on Cromwell:—

“ His ashes in a peaceful urn shall rest;  
 His name a great example stands to show,  
 How strangely high endeavours may be blessed,  
 Where piety and valour jointly go.”

or, in another metre and another strain of politics, the conclusion of the poem addressed to Charles:—

“ The discontented now are only they  
 Whose crimes before did your just cause betray:  
 Of those your edicts some reclaim from sin,  
 But most your life and blest example win.  
 Oh happy prince! whom Heaven hath taught the way,  
 By paying vows to have more vows to pay!  
 Oh happy age! Oh times like those alone,  
 By fate reserved for great Augustus' throne!  
 When the joint growth of arms and arts foreshow  
 The world a monarch, and that monarch you.”

Such were the *personal elements*, if we may so call them, available at the beginning of the reign of Charles II., for the commencement of a new era in English literature. Let us see next, what were the more pronounced *tendencies* visible amid these personal elements; in other words, what tone of moral sentiment, and what peculiarities of literary style and method were then in the ascendant, and likely to determine the character of the budding authorship.

It was pre-eminently clear that the forthcoming literature would be Royalist and anti-Puritan. With the exception of Milton, there was not one man of known literary power, whose heart still beat as it did when Cromwell sat on the throne, and whose muse magnanimously disdained the change that had befallen the nation. Puritanism, as a whole, was driven back into the concealed vitals of the community, to sustain itself meanwhile as a sectarian theology lurking in chapels and conventicles, and only to re-appear after a lapse of years as an ingredient in the philosophy of Locke and his contemporaries. The literary men who stepped forward to lead the literature of the Restoration were royalists and courtiers—some of them honest cavaliers rejoicing at being let loose from the restraints of the Commonwealth; others, time-servers, making up for delay by the fulsome excess of their zeal for the new state of things. It was part of this change that there should be an affectation, even where there was not the reality, of lax morals. According to the sarcasm of the time, it was necessary now for those who would escape the risk of being thought Puritans, to contract a habit of swearing, and pretend to be great rakes. And this increase, both in the practice and in the profession of profligacy, at once connected itself with that institution of English society, which, from the very fact that it had been suppressed by the Puritans, now became doubly attractive and popular. The same revolution which restored royalty in England re-opened the play-houses; and in them, as the established organs of popular sentiment, all the anti-Puritanic tendencies of the time hastened to find vent. The custom of having female actors on the stage for female parts, instead of boys as hereto-

fore, was now permanently introduced, and brought many scandals along with it. Whether, as some surmise, the very suppression of the theatres during the reign of Puritanism contributed to their unusual corruptness when they were again allowed by law, by damming up, as it were, a quantity of social pruriency which had afterwards to be let loose in a mass, it is not easy to say; it is certain, however, that at no time in this country did impurity run so openly at riot in any literary guise as in the Drama of the Restoration. It seemed as if the national cranium of England, to use a phrenological figure, had suddenly been contracted in every other direction so as to permit an inordinate protuberance of that particular region which is situated above the nape of the neck. This enormous preponderance of the back of the head in literature was most conspicuously exhibited in Comedy. Every comedy that was produced represented life as a meagre action of persons and interests on a slight proscenium of streets and bits of green field, behind which lay the real business, transacted in stews. To set against this, it is true, there was a so-called Tragic Drama. The tragedy that was now in favour, however, was no longer the old English tragedy of rich and complex materials, but the French tragedy of heroic declamation. Familiarized by their stay in France with the tragic style of Corneille and other dramatists of the court of Louis XIV., the royalists brought back the taste with them into England; and the poets who catered for them hastened to abandon the Shakespearian tragedy with its large range of time and action and its blank verse, and to put on the stage tragedies of sustained and decorous declamation in the heroic or rhymed couplet, conceived, as much as possible, after the model of Corneille. Natural to the French, this classic or regular style accorded ill with English faculties and habits; and Corneille himself would have been horrified at the slovenly and laborious attempts of the English in imitation of his masterpieces. The effect of French influence at this time, however, on English literary taste, did not consist merely in the introduction of the heroic or rhymed drama. The same influence extended, and, in some respects, beneficially, to all



departments of English literature. It helped, for example, to correct that peculiar style of so-called "wit," which, originating with the dregs of the Elizabethan age, had during a whole generation, infected English prose and poetry, but more especially the latter. The characteristic of the metaphysical school of poetry, as it is called, which took its rise in a literary vice perceptible even in the great works of the Elizabethan age, and of which Donne and Cowley were the most celebrated representatives, consisted in the identification of mere intellectual subtlety with poetic genius. To spin out a fantastic conceit, to pursue a thread of quaint thought as long as it could be held between the fingers of the metre without snapping, and, in doing so, to wind it about as many odd allusions to the real world as possible, and introduce as many verbal quibbles as possible, was the aim of the "metaphysical poets." Some of them, like Donne and Cowley, were men of independent merit; but the style of poetry itself, as all modern readers confess by the alacrity with which they shy out of the way of reprinted specimens of it, was as unprofitable an investment of human ingenuity as ever was attempted. At the period of the Restoration, and partly in consequence of French influence, this kind of wit was falling into disrepute. There were still practitioners of it; but, on the whole, a more direct, clear, and light manner of writing was coming into fashion. Discourse became less stiff and pedantic; or, as Dryden himself has expressed it, "the fire of English wit, which was before stifled under a constrained melancholy way of breeding, began to display its force by mixing the solidity of our nation with the air and gaiety of our neighbours." And the change in discourse passed without difficulty into literature, calling into being a nimbler style of wit, a more direct, rapid, and decisive manner of thought and expression, than had beseeemed authorship before. In particular, and apart from the tendency to greater directness and concision of thought, there was an increased attention to correctness of expression. The younger literary men began to object to what they called the involved and incorrect syntax of the writers of the previous age, and to pretend themselves to greater neatness



and accuracy in the construction of their sentences. It was at this time, for example, that the rule of not ending a sentence with a preposition or other little word began to be attended to. Whether the notion of correctness, implied in this, and other such rules, was a true notion, and whether the writers of the Restoration excelled their Elizabethan predecessors in this quality of correctness, admits of being doubted. Certain it is, however, that a change in the mechanism of writing—this change being on the whole towards increased neatness—did become apparent about this time. The change was visible in prose; but far more so in verse. For, to conclude this enumeration of the literary signs or tendencies of the age of the Restoration, it was a firm belief of the writers of the period that then, for the first time, was the art of correct English versification exemplified and appreciated. It was, we say, a firm belief of the time, and, indeed, it has been a commonplace of criticism ever since, that Edmund Waller was the first poet who wrote smooth and accurate verse; that in this he was followed by Sir John Denham; and that these two men were, so to speak, reformers of English metre. “Well-placing of words, for the sweetness of pronunciation, was not known till Mr. Waller introduced it,” is a deliberate statement of Dryden himself, meant to apply especially to verse. Now, here, again, we have to separate a matter of fact from a matter of doctrine. To aver, with such specimens of older English verse before us as the works of Chaucer and Spenser, and the minor poems of Milton, that it was Waller or any other petty writer of the Restoration that first taught us sweetness, or smoothness, or even correctness of verse, is so ridiculous, that the currency of such a notion can only be accounted for by the servility with which small critics go on repeating whatever any one big critic has said. That Waller and Denham, however, did set the example of something new in the manner of English versification—which “something” Dryden, Pope, and other poets who afterwards adopted it, regarded as an improvement, needs not be doubted. For us, it is sufficient in the meantime to recognise the change as an attempt after greater neatness of mechanical structure,

leaving open the question whether it was a change for the better.

It was natural that the tendencies of English literature thus enumerated should be represented in the poet-laureate for the time being. Who was the fit man to be appointed laureate at the Restoration? Milton was out of the question, having none of the requisites. Butler, the man of greatest natural power of a different order, and possessing certainly as much of the anti-Puritan sentiment as Charles and his courtiers could have desired in their laureate, was not yet sufficiently known, and was, besides, neither a dramatist nor a fine gentleman. Cowley, whom public opinion would have pointed out as best entitled to the honour, was somehow not in much favour at court, and was spending the remainder of his days on a little property near Chertsey. Waller and Denham were wealthy men, with whom literature was but an amusement. On the whole, Sir William Davenant was felt to be the proper man for the office. He was an approved royalist; had, in fact, been laureate to Charles I., after Ben Jonson's death in 1637; and had suffered personally in the cause of the king. He was, moreover, a literary man by profession. He had been an actor and a theatre-manager before the Commonwealth; he had been the first to start a theatre after the relaxed rule of Cromwell made it possible; and he was one of the first to attempt heroic or rhymed tragedies after the French model. He was also, far more than Cowley, a wit of the new school; and, as a versifier, he practised, with no small reputation, the neat, lucid style introduced by Denham and Waller. He was the author of an epic called *Gondibert*, written in rhymed stanzas of four lines each, and which Hobbes praised as showing "more shape of art, health of morality, and vigour and beauty of expression," than any poem he had ever read. We defy any one to read the poem now; but there have been worse things written; and it has the merit of being a careful and rather serious composition by a man who had industry, education, and taste, but no genius.\* The only awkwardness in having such a man for a laureate was, that he had no nose. This awkwardness, however, had existed at the time of his

\* "*Gondibert* is the work of a man of great intellect & fine genius; it is full of fine images, ingenious reflections, & noble sentiments. He has no nose."

first appointment in the preceding reign. At least, Suckling adverts to it in his *Session of the Poets*, where he makes the wits of that time contend for the bays—

“ Will Davenant, ashamed of a foolish mischance,  
That he had got lately, travelling in France,  
Modestly hoped the handsomeness of 's muse  
Might any deformity about him excuse.

“ And surely the company would have been content,  
If they could have found any precedent;  
But in all their records, either in verse or prose,  
There was not one laureate without a nose.”

If the more decorous court of Charles I., however, overlooked this facial deficiency, it was not for that of Charles II. to take objection to it; the more especially as it might be regarded, if Suckling's insinuation is true, as entitling the poet to additional sympathy from Charles and his companions. After all, Davenant, notwithstanding his misfortune, seems to have been not the worst gentleman about Charles's court, either in morals or manners. Milton is said to have known and liked him.

Davenant's laureateship extended over the first eight years of the Restoration, or from 1660 to 1668. Much was done in these eight years both by himself and others. Heroic plays and comedies were produced in sufficient abundance to supply the two theatres then open in London—one of them called the Duke's company, under Davenant's management; the other, the King's company, under the management of an actor named Killigrew. The number of writers for the stage was very great, including not only those whose names have been mentioned, but others new to fame. The literature of the stage formed by far the largest proportion of what was written, or even of what was published. Literary efforts of other kinds, however, were not wanting. Of satires, and small poems in the witty or amatory style, there was no end. The publication of the first part of his *Hudibras* in 1663, and of the second in 1664, drew public attention, for the first time, to a man, already past his fiftieth year, who had more true wit in him than all the aristocratic poets put together. The poem was received by the king and the courtiers with roars of laughter; quotations from it were in everybody's mouth; but notwith-

standing large promises, nothing substantial was done for the author. Meanwhile Milton, blind and gouty, and living in his house near Bunhill Fields, where his visitors were hardly of the kind that admired Butler's poem, was calmly proceeding with his *Paradise Lost*. The poem was finished and published in 1667, leaving Milton free for other work. Cowley, who would have welcomed such a poem, and whose praise Milton would have valued more than that of any other contemporary, died in the year of its publication. Davenant may have read it before his death in the following year; but perhaps the only poet of the time who hailed its appearance with enthusiasm adequate to the occasion, was Milton's personal friend, Marvel. Gradually, however, copies of the poem found their way about town, and drew public attention once more to Cromwell's old secretary.

The laureateship remained vacant two years after Davenant's death; and then it was conferred—on whom? There can be little doubt that, of those eligible to it, Butler had, in some respects, the best title. The author of *Hudibras*, however, seems to have been one of those ill-conditioned sarcastic men whom patronage never comes near, and who are left, as a matter of necessity, to the bitter enjoyment of their own humours. There does not seem to have been even a question of appointing him; and the office, the income of which would have been a competence to him, was conferred on a man twenty years his junior, and whose circumstances required it less—John Dryden. The appointment, which was made in August, 1670, conferred on Dryden not only the laureateship, but also the office of "historiographer royal," which chanced to be vacant at the same time. The income accruing from the two offices thus conjoined was 200*l.* a-year, which was about as valuable then as 600*l.* a-year would be now; and it was expressly stated in the deed of appointment that these emoluments were conferred on Dryden "in consideration of his many acceptable services done to his majesty, and from an observation of his learning and eminent abilities, and his great skill and elegant style both in verse and prose." At the time of the Restoration, or even for a year or two after it,

such language could, by no stretch of courtesy, have been applied to Dryden. At that time, as we have seen, Dryden, though already past his thirtieth year, was certainly about the least distinguished person in the little band of wits that were looking forward to the good time coming. He was a stout, fresh-complexioned man, in grey drugget, who had written some robust stanzas on Cromwell's death, and a short poem, also robust, but rather wooden, on Charles's return. That was about all that was then known about him. What had he done, in the interval, to raise him so high, and to make it natural for the court to prefer him to what was in fact the titular supremacy of English literature, over the heads of others who might be supposed to have claims, and especially over poor battered old Butler? A glance at Dryden's life, during Davenant's laureateship, or between 1660 and 1670, will answer this question.

Dryden's connexion with the politics of the Protectorate had not been such as to make his immediate and cordial attachment to the cause of restored royalty either very strange or very unhandsome. Not committed either by strong personal convictions, or by acts, to the Puritan side, he hastened to show that, whatever the older Northamptonshire Drydens and their relatives might think of the matter, he, for one, was willing to be a loyal subject of Charles, both in church and in state. This main point being settled, he had only farther to consider into what particular walk of industry, now that official employment under government was cut off, he should carry his loyalty and his powers. The choice was not difficult. There was but one career open for him, or suitable to his tastes and qualifications—that of general authorship. We say “general authorship;” for it is important to remark that Dryden was by no means nice in his choice of work. He was ready for anything of a literary kind to which he was, or could make himself, competent. He had probably a preference for verse; but he had no disinclination to prose, if that article was in demand in the market. He had a store of acquirements, academic and other, that fitted him for an intelligent apprehension of whatever was going on in



any of the London circles of that day—the circle of the scholars, that of the amateurs of natural science, or that of the mere wits and men of letters. He was, in fact, a man of general intellectual strength, which he was willing to let out in any kind of tolerably honest intellectual service that might be in fashion. This being the case, he set the right way to work to make himself known in quarters where such service was going on. He had about 40*l.* a-year of inherited fortune; which means something equivalent to 120*l.* a-year with us. With this income to supply his immediate wants, he went to live with Herringman, a bookseller and publisher in the New Exchange. What was the precise nature of his agreement with Herringman, cannot be ascertained. His literary enemies used afterwards to say that he was Herringman's hack, and wrote prefaces for him. However this may be, there were higher conveniences in being connected with Herringman. He was one of the best known of the London publishers of the day, was a personal friend of Davenant, and had almost all the wits of the day as his customers and occasional visitors. Through him, in all probability, Dryden first became acquainted with some of these men, including Davenant himself, Cowley, and a third person of considerable note at that time as an aristocratic dabbler in literature—Sir Robert Howard, son of the Earl of Berkshire. That the impression he made on these men and others, in or out of the Herringman circle, was no mean one, is proved by the fact that, in 1663, we find him a member of the Royal Society, the foundation of which by royal charter had taken place in the previous year. The number of members was then one hundred and fifteen, including such scientific celebrities of the time as Boyle, Wallis, Wilkins, Christopher Wren, Dr. Isaac Barrow, Evelyn, and Hooke, besides such titled amateurs of experimental science as the Duke of Buckingham, the Marquis of Dorchester, the Earls of Devonshire, Crawford, and Northampton, and Lords Brouncker, Cavendish, and Berkeley. Among the more purely literary members were Waller, Denham, Cowley, and Sprat, afterwards Bishop of Rochester. The admission of Dryden into such company is a proof that already he was

socially a man of mark. As we have Dryden's own confession that he was somewhat dull and sluggish in conversation, and the testimony of others that he was the very reverse of a bustling or pushing man, and rather avoided society than sought it, we must suppose that he had been found out, as it were, in spite of himself. We can fancy him at Herringman's, or elsewhere, sitting as one of a group with Davenant, Howard, and others, taking snuff and listening, rather than speaking; yet, when he did speak, doing so with such judgment, as to make his chair one of the most important in the room, and impress all with the conviction that that Dryden was a solid fellow. He seems also to have taken an interest in the scientific gossip of the day about magnetism, the circulation of the blood, and the prospects of the Baconian system of philosophy; and this may have helped to bring him in contact with men like Boyle, Wren, and Wallis. At all events, if the Society elected him on trust, he soon justified their choice by taking his place among the best known members of what was then the most important class of literary men—the writers for the stage. His first drama, a lumbering prose-comedy, entitled *The Wild Gallant*, was produced at Killigrew's Theatre in February, 1662-3; and, though its success was very indifferent, he was not discouraged from a second venture in a tragi-comedy, entitled *The Rival Ladies*, written partly in blank verse, partly in heroic rhyme, and produced at the same theatre. This attempt was more successful; and, in 1664, there was produced, as the joint composition of Dryden and Sir Robert Howard, an attempt in the style of the regular heroic or rhymed tragedy, called *The Indian Queen*. The date of this effort of literary co-partnership between Dryden and his aristocratic friend, coincides with the formation of a more intimate connexion between them, by Dryden's marriage with Sir Robert's sister, Lady Elizabeth Howard. The marriage, the result, it would seem, of a visit of the poet, in the company of Sir Robert, to the Earl of Berkshire's seat in Wilts, took place in November, 1663; so that when *The Indian Queen* was written, the two authors were already brothers-in-law. The marriage of a man



in the poet's circumstances with an earl's daughter, was neither altogether strange nor altogether such as to preclude remark. The earl was poor, and able to afford his daughter but a small settlement; and Dryden was a man of sufficiently good family, his grandfather having been a baronet, and some of his living relations having landed property in Northamptonshire. The property remaining for the support of Dryden's brothers and sisters, however, after the subduction of his own share as the eldest son, had been too scanty to keep them all in their original station; and some of them had fallen a little lower in the world. One sister, in particular, had married a tobacconist in London—a connexion not likely to be agreeable to the Earl of Berkshire and his sons, if they took the trouble to become cognisant of it. Dryden himself probably moved conveniently enough between the one relationship and the other. If his aristocratic brother-in-law, Sir Robert, could write plays with him and the like, his other brother-in-law, the tobacconist of Newgate-street, may have administered to his comfort in other ways. It is known that the poet, in his later life at least, was peculiarly fastidious in the article of snuff, abhorring all ordinary snuffs, and satisfied only with a mixture which he prepared himself; and it is not unlikely that the foundation of this fastidiousness may have been laid in the facilities afforded him originally in his brother-in-law's shop. The tobacconist's wife, of course, would be pleased now and then to have a visit from her brother John; but whether Lady Elizabeth ever went to see her, is rather doubtful. According to all accounts, Dryden's experience of this lady was not such as to improve his ideas of the matrimonial state, or to give encouragement to future poets to marry earls' daughters.

In consequence of the ravages of the Great Plague in 1665, and the subsequent disaster of the Great Fire in 1666, there was for some time a total cessation in London of theatrical performances and all other amusements. Dryden, like most other persons who were not tied to town by business, spent the greater part of this gloomy period in the country. He availed himself of the interruption thus given to his dramatic

labours, to produce his first writings of any moment out of that field, his *Annus Mirabilis*, and his *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*. The first, an attempt to invest with heroic interest, and celebrate in sonorous stanzas, the events of the famous year 1665-6, including not only the Great Fire, but also the incidents of a naval war then going on against the Dutch, must have done more to bring Dryden into the favourable notice of the King, the Duke of York, and other high personages eulogized in it, than anything he had yet written. It was, in fact, a kind of short epic on the topics of the year, such as Dryden might have been expected to write, if he had been already doing laureate's duty; and unless Sir William Davenant was of very easy temper, he must have been rather annoyed at so obvious an invasion of his province, notwithstanding the compliment the poet had paid him by adopting the stanza of his *Gondibert*, and imitating his manner. Scarcely less effective in another way must have been the prose "Essay on Dramatic Poesy"—a vigorous treatise on various matters of poetry and criticism then much discussed. It contained, among other things, a defence of the Heroic or Rhymed Tragedy against those who preferred the older Elizabethan Tragedy of blank verse; and so powerful a contribution was it to this great controversy of the day, that it produced an immediate sensation in all literary circles. Sir Robert Howard, who now ranked himself among the partisans of blank verse, took occasion to express his dissent from some of the opinions expounded in it; and, as Dryden replied rather tartly, a temporary quarrel ensued between the two brothers-in-law.

On the re-opening of the theatres in 1667, Dryden, his reputation increased by the two performances just mentioned, stepped forward again as a dramatist. A heroic tragedy called *The Indian Emperor*, which he had prepared before the recess, and which, indeed, had then been acted, was reproduced with great success, and established Dryden's position as a practitioner of heroic and rhymed tragedy. This was followed by a comedy, in mixed blank verse and prose, called *The Maiden Queen*; this by a prose-comedy called

*Sir Martin Mar-all*; and this again, by an adaptation, in conjunction with Sir William Davenant, of Shakespeare's *Tempest*. The two last were produced at Davenant's theatre, whereas all Dryden's former pieces had been written for Killigrew's, or the King's company. About this time, however, an arrangement was made which secured Dryden's services exclusively for Killigrew's house. By the terms of the agreement, Dryden engaged to supply the house with three plays every year, in return for which, he was admitted a shareholder in the profits of the theatre to the extent of one share and a-half. The first fruits of the bargain were a prose-comedy called *The Mock Astrologer*, and two heroic tragedies under the titles *Tyrannic Love*, and *The Conquest of Granada*, the latter being in two parts. These were all produced between 1668 and 1670, and the tragedies, in particular, seem to have taken the town by storm, and placed Dryden, beyond dispute, at the head of all the heroic playwrights of the day.

The extent and nature of Dryden's popularity as a dramatist about this time may be judged by the following extract from the diary of the omnipresent Pepys, referring to the first performance of the *Maiden Queen*:—"After dinner, with my wife to see the *Maiden Queene*, a new play by Dryden, mightily commended for the regularity of it, and the strain and wit; and the truth is, the comical part done by Nell (Nell Gwyn), which is Florimell, that I never can hope to see the like done again by man or woman. The King and Duke of York were at the play. But so great a performance of a comical part was never, I believe, in the world before as Nell do this, both as a mad girle, then most and best of all when she comes in like a young gallant, and hath the motions and carriage of a spark the most that ever I saw any man have. It makes me, I confess, admire her." But even Nell's performance in this comedy was nothing compared to one part of her performance afterwards in the tragedy of *Tyrannic Love*. Probably there was never such a scene of ecstasy in a theatre, as when Nell, after acting the character of a tragic princess in this play, and killing herself at the close in a

grand passage of heroism and supernatural virtue, had to start up as she was being borne off the stage dead, and resume her natural character, first addressing her bearer in these words:—

“ Hold ! are you mad ! you d——d confounded dog ;  
I am to rise, and speak the epilogue.”

and then running to the footlights, and beginning her speech to the audience:—

“ I come, kind gentlemen, strange news to tell ye,  
I am the ghost of poor departed Nelly.  
Sweet ladies, be not frightened ; I’ll be civil :  
I’m what I was a little harmless devil,” &c. &c.

It is a tradition that it was this epilogue that effected Nell’s conquest of the king, and that he was so fascinated with her manner of delivering it, that he went behind the scenes after the play was over, and carried her off that very night. Ah ! and it is a hundred and eighty-four years since that fascinating run to the footlights took place, and the swarthy face of the monarch was seen laughing, and the audience shrieked and clapped with delight, and Pepys bustled about the boxes, and Dryden sat looking placidly on, contented with his success, and wondering how much of it was owing to Nelly !

One can see how, even if the choice had been made strictly with a reference to the claims of the candidates, it would have been felt that Dryden, and not Butler, was the proper man to succeed Davenant in the laureateship. If Butler had shewn the more original vein of talent in one peculiar walk, Dryden had proved himself the man of greatest general strength, in whom were more broadly represented the various literary tendencies of his time. The author of ten plays, four of which were stately rhymed tragedies, and the rest comedies in prose and blank verse ; the author, also, of various occasional poems, one of which, the *Annus Mirabilis*, was noticeable on its own account as the best poem of current history ; the author, moreover, of one express prose-treatise and of various shorter prose dissertations in the shape of prefaces and the like, prefixed to his separate plays and poems, in which the principles of literature were discussed in a manner at once masterly and adapted to the prevailing taste—Dryden was, on the whole,

far more likely to perform well that part of a laureate's duties which consisted in supervising and leading the general literature of his age, than a man whose reputation, though justly great, had been acquired by one continuous effort in the single department of burlesque. Accordingly, Dryden was promoted to the post, and Butler was left to finish, on his own scanty resources, the remaining portion of his *Hudibras*, varying the occupation by jotting down those scraps of cynical thought which were found among his posthumous papers, and which show that towards the end of his days there were other things that he hated and would have lashed besides Puritanism. Thus:—

“ 'Tis a strange age we've lived in, and a lewd  
As e'er the sun in all his travels viewed.”

Again :

“ The greatest saints and sinners have been made  
Of proselytes of one another's trade.”

Again :

“ Authority is a disease and a cure,  
Which men can neither want nor well endure.”

And again, with an obvious reference to his own case:—

“ Dame Fortune, some men's titular,  
Takes charge of them without their care,  
Does all their drudgery and work,  
Like fairies, for them in the dark;  
Conducts them blindfold, and advances  
The naturals by blinder chances;  
While others by desert and wit  
Could never make the matter hit;  
But still, the better they deserve,  
Are but the abler thought to starve.”

1670 Dryden, at the time of his appointment to the laureateship, was in his fortieth year,—a circumstance worth noting, if we would realize his position, as laureate, among his literary contemporaries. Of these contemporaries there were some who, as being his seniors, would feel themselves free from all obligations to pay him respect. To octogenarians like Hobbes and Izaak Walton, he was but a boy; and even from Waller, Milton, Butler, and Marvel, all of whom lived to see him in the laureate's chair, he could only look for that approving recognition, totally distinct from reverence, which



men of sixty-five, sixty, and fifty-five bestow on their full-grown juniors. Such an amount of recognition he seems to have received from all of them. Butler indeed, does not seem to have taken very kindly to him: and it stands on record, as Milton's opinion of Dryden's powers about this period, that he thought him "a rhymers but no poet." But Butler, who went about snarling at most things, and was irreverent enough to think the Royal Society itself little better than a humbug, was not the man from whom a laudatory estimate of anybody was to be expected; and, though Milton's criticism is too precious to be thrown away, and will even be found on investigation to be not so far amiss, if the moment at which it was given is duly borne in mind, yet it is, after all, not Milton's opinion of Dryden's general literary capacity, but only his opinion of his claims to be called a poet. Dryden, on his part, to whose charge any want of veneration for his great literary predecessors cannot be imputed, and whose faculty of appreciating the most various kinds of excellence was conspicuously large, would probably have been more grieved than indignant at this indifference of men like Butler and Milton to his rising fame. He had an unfeigned admiration for the author of *Hudibras*; and there was not a man in England who more profoundly revered the poet of *Paradise Lost*, and more dutifully testified this reverence both by acts of personal attention and by written expressions of allegiance to him while he was yet alive. It would have pained Dryden much, we believe, to know that the great Puritan poet, whom he made it a point of duty to go and see now and then in his solitude, and of whom he is reported to have said, on reading the *Paradise Lost*, "This man cuts us all out, and the ancients, too," thought no better of him than that he was a rhymers. But, however he may have felt himself related to those seniors who were vanishing from the stage, or whose literary era was in the past, it was in a conscious spirit of superiority that he confronted the generation of his coevals and juniors, the natural subjects of his laureateship. Setting aside such men as Locke and Barrow, belonging more to other departments than that of literature proper, there were

none of these coevals or juniors who were entitled to dispute his authority. There was the Duke of Buckingham, a year or two older than Dryden, at once the greatest wit and the greatest profligate about Charles's court, but whose attempts as a comic dramatist were little more than occasional eccentricities. There were the Earls of Dorset and Roscommon, both about Dryden's age, and both cultivated men and respectable versifiers. There was Thomas Sprat, afterwards Bishop of Rochester, and now chaplain to his grace of Buckingham, five years younger than Dryden, his fellow-member in the Royal Society, and with considerable pretensions to literary excellence. There was the witty rake, Sir Charles Sedley, a man of frolic, like Buckingham, some seven years Dryden's junior, and the author of at least three comedies and three tragedies. There was the still more witty rake, Sir George Etherege, of about the same age, the author of two comedies, produced between 1660 and 1670, which, for ease and sprightly fluency, surpassed anything that Dryden had done in the comic style. But "gentle George," as he was called, was incorrigibly lazy; and it did not seem as if the public would get anything more from him. In his place had come another gentleman-writer, young William Wycherley, whose first comedy had been written before Dryden's laureateship, though it was not acted till 1672, and who was already famous as a wit. Of precisely the same age as Wycherley, and with a far greater *quantity* of comic writing in him, whatever might be thought of the quality, was Thomas Shadwell, whose bulky body was a perpetual source of jest against him, though he himself vaunted it as one of his many resemblances to Ben Jonson. The contemporary opinion of these two last-named comic poets, Wycherley and Shadwell, after they came to be better known, is expressed in these lines from a poem of Rochester's:—

“ Of all our modern wits, none seem to me  
 Once to have touched upon true comedy,  
 But hasty Shadwell and slow Wycherley.  
 Shadwell's unfinished works do yet impart  
 Great proofs of force of Nature, none of Art.  
 With just bold strokes he dashes here and there,  
 Showing great mastery with little care;



Scorning to varnish his good touches o'er,  
 To make the fools and women praise the more.  
 But Wycherley earns Lard whate'er he galls;  
 He wants no judgment, and he spares no pains;  
 He frequently excels, and, at the least,  
 Makes fewer faults than any of the rest."

The author of these lines, the notorious Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, was also one of Dryden's literary subjects. He was but twenty-two years of age when Dryden became laureate; but before ten years of that laureateship were over he had blazed out, in rapid debauchery, his wretchedly-spent life. Younger by three years than Rochester, and also destined to a short life, though more of misery than of crime, was Thomas Otway, of whose six tragedies and four comedies, all produced during the laureateship of Dryden, one at least has taken a place in our dramatic literature, and is read still for its power and pathos. Associated with Otway's name is that of Nat. Lee, more than Otway's match in fury, and who, after a brief career as a tragic dramatist and drunkard, became an inmate of Bedlam. Another writer of tragedy, whose career began with Dryden's laureateship, was John Crowne, "little starched Johnny Crowne," as Rochester calls him, but whom so good a judge as Charles Lamb has thought worthy of commemoration as having written some really fine things. Finally, a few Nahum Tates, Elkanah Settle, Tom D'Urfey and other small celebrities, in whose company we may place Aphra Behn, the poetess, close the list.

Doing our best to fancy this cluster of wits and playwrights, in the midst of which, from his appointment to the laureateship in 1670, at the age of forty, to his deposition from that office in 1689, at the age of fifty-eight, Dryden is historically the principal figure, we can very well see that not one of them all could wrest the dictatorship from him. With an income from various sources, including his salary as laureate and historiographer, and his receipts from his engagement with Killigrew's company, amounting in all to about 600*l.* a-year, which, according to Sir Walter Scott's computation, means about 1,800*l.* in our value, he had, during a portion of this time at least, all the means of external respectability in

sufficient abundance. His reputation as the first dramatic author of the day, was already made; and if, as yet, there were others who had done as well or better as poets out of the dramatic walk, he more than made up for this by the excellence of his prologues and epilogues, and by his readiness and power as a prose-critic of general literature. No one could deny that, though a rather heavy man in private society, and so slow and silent among the wits of the coffee-house that, but for the pleasure of seeing his placid face, the deeply indented leather chair on which he sat would have done as well to represent literature there as his own presence in it, John Dryden was, all in all, the first wit of the age. There was not a Buckingham, nor an Etherege, nor a Shadwell, nor a starched Johnny Crowne, of them all, that singly would have dared to dispute his supremacy. And yet, as will happen, what his subjects would not dare to do singly, or ostensibly, some of them tried to compass by cabal and systematic depreciation on particular points. In fact, Dryden had to fight pretty hard to maintain his place, and had to make an example or two of a rebel subject before the rest were terrified into submission.

He was first attacked in the very field of his greatest triumphs—the drama. The attack was partly directed against himself personally, partly against that style of the heroic or rhymed tragedy, of which he was the advocate and representative. There had always been dissenters from this new fashion; and among these was the Duke of Buckingham, who had a natural genius for making fun of anything. Assisted, it is said, by his chaplain, Sprat, and by Butler, who had already satirized this style of tragedy by writing a dialogue, in which two cats are made to caterwaul to each other in heroics, the duke had amused his leisure by preparing a farce, in which heroic plays were held up to ridicule. In the original draft of the farce, Davenant was made the butt under the name of Bilboa; but, after Davenant's death, the farce was recast, and Dryden substituted under the name of Bayes. The plot of this famous farce, the *Rehearsal*, is much the same as that of Sheridan's *Critic*. The poet Bayes invites

two friends, Smith and Johnson, to be present at the rehearsal of a heroic play which he is on the point of bringing out, and the humour consists in the supposed representation of this heroic play, while Bayes alternately directs the actors, and expounds the drift of the play and its beauties to Smith and Johnson, who all the while are laughing at him, and thinking it monstrous rubbish. Conceive a farce like this, written with amazing cleverness, and full of absurdities, produced in the very theatre where the echoes of Dryden's last sonorous heroics were still lingering, and acted by the same actors; conceive it interspersed with parodies of well-known passages from Dryden's plays, and with allusions to characters in these plays; conceive the actor who played the part of Bayes, dressed to look as like Dryden as possible, instructed by the duke to mimic Dryden's voice, and using phrases like "i'gad," and "i'fackins," which Dryden was in the habit of using in familiar conversation; and an idea may be formed of the sensation made by the *Rehearsal* in all theatrical circles on its first performance in the winter of 1671. Its effect, though not immediate, was decisive. From that time the heroic or rhymed tragedy was felt to be doomed. Dryden, indeed, did not at once recant his opinion in favour of rhymed tragedies, but he yielded so far to the sentence pronounced against them, as to write only one more of the kind.

Though thus driven out of his favourite style of the rhymed tragedy, however, he was not driven from the stage. Bound by his agreement with the king's company to furnish three plays a-year, he continued to make dramatic writing his chief occupation; and almost his sole productions during the first ten years of his laureateship, were ten plays. Three of these were prose-comedies; one, a tragi-comedy, in blank verse and prose; one, an opera in rhyme; five, tragedies in blank verse; and one, the rhymed tragedy above referred to. It will be observed that this was at the rate of only one play a-year; whereas, by his engagement, he was to furnish three. The fact was, however, that the company were very indulgent to him, and let him have his full share of the receipts, averaging 300*l.* a-year, in return for but a third of the stipulated work.

Notwithstanding this, we find them complaining, in 1679, that Dryden had behaved unhandsomely to them in carrying one of his plays to the other theatre, and so injuring their interests. As, from that year, none of Dryden's plays were produced at the King's Theatre, but all at the Duke's, till 1682, when the two companies were united, it is probable that, in that year, the bargain made with Killigrew terminated. It deserves notice, by the way, that the so-called "opera" was one entitled *The State of Innocence, or the Fall of Man*, founded on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and brought out in 1674-5, immediately after Milton's death. That this was an equivocal compliment to Milton's memory, Dryden himself lived to acknowledge. He confessed to Dennis, twenty years afterwards, that at the time when he wrote that opera "he knew not half the extent of Milton's excellence." A striking proof of Dryden's immense veneration for Milton, considering how high his admiration of Milton had been even while he was alive!

Of these dramatic productions of Dryden during the first ten years of his laureateship, some were very carefully written. Thus *Marriage-à-la-mode*, performed in 1672, is esteemed one of his best comedies; and of the rhymed tragedy, *Aurung-Zebe*, performed in 1675, he himself says, in the Prologue—

"What verse can do he has performed in this,  
Which he presumes the most correct of his."

The tragedy of *All for Love*, which followed *Aurung-Zebe*, in 1678, and in which he falls back on blank verse, is pronounced by many critics to be the very best of all his dramas; and perhaps none of his plays have been more read than the *Spanish Friar*, written in 1680. Yet it may be doubted if in any of these plays Dryden achieved a degree of immediate success equal to that which had attended his *Tyrannic Love*, and his *Conquest of Granada*, written before his laureateship. This was not owing so much to the single blow struck at his fame by Buckingham's *Rehearsal*, as to the growth of that general spirit of criticism and disaffection which pursues every author

after the public have become sufficiently acquainted with his style to expect the good, and look rather for the bad, in what he writes. Thus, we find one critic of the day, Martin Clifford, who was a man of some note, addressing Dryden, a year or two after his laureateship, in this polite fashion: "You do live in as much ignorance and darkness as you did in the womb; your writings are like a Jack-of-all-trades' shop; they have a variety, but nothing of value; and if thou art not the dullest plant-animal that ever the earth produced, all that I have conversed with are strangely mistaken in thee." This onslaught of Mr. Clifford's is clearly to be regarded as only that gentleman's; but what young Rochester said and thought about Dryden at this time is more likely to have been what was said and thought generally by the critical part of the town.

"Well sir, 'tis granted: I said Dryden's rhymes  
 Were stolen, unequal—nay, dull, many times.  
 What foolish patron is there found of his,  
 So blindly partial to deny me this?  
 But that his plays, embroidered up and down  
 With wit and learning, justly pleased the town,  
 In the same paper I as freely own.  
 Yet, having this allowed, the heavy mass  
 That stuffs up his loose volumes, must not pass.  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 But, to be just, 'twill to his praise be found,  
 His excellencies more than faults abound;  
 Nor dare I from his sacred temples tear  
 The laurel which he best deserves to wear.  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 And may I not have leave impartially  
 To search and censure Dryden's works, and try  
 If these gross faults his choice pen doth commit,  
 Proceed from want of judgment or of wit;  
 Or if his lumpish fancy doth refuse  
 Spirit and grace to his loose slattern muse?"

We have no doubt this opinion, thus expressed by the scape-grace young earl, was very general. Dryden's own prose disquisitions on the principles of poetry may have helped to diffuse many of those notions of genuine poetical merit by which he was now tried. But, undoubtedly, what most of all tended to expose Dryden's reputation to the perils of criticism was the increasing number of his dramatic competitors, and the evident ability of some of them. True, most of these

competitors were Dryden's personal friends, and some of the younger of them, as Lee, Shadwell, Crowne, and Tate, were in the habit of coming to him for prologues and epilogues, with which to increase the attractions of their plays. On more than one occasion, too, Dryden clubbed with Lee or Shadwell in the composition of a dramatic piece. But, though thus on a friendly footing with most of his contemporary dramatists, and almost in a fatherly relation to some of them, Dryden's popularity was not the less affected by their competition. In the department of prose comedy, Etherege, whose last and best comedy, *Sir Fopling Flutter*, was produced in 1676, and Wycherley, whose four celebrated comedies were all produced between 1672 and 1677, had introduced a style compared with which Dryden's best comic attempts were but heavy horse-play. Even the fat hulking Shadwell, who dashed off his comedies as fast as he could write, had a vein of coarse natural humour which Dryden wanted. It was in vain that Dryden tried to keep his pre-eminence against these rivals by increased strength of language, increased intricacy of plot, and an increased use of those brutal obscenities upon which they all relied so much in their efforts to please. One comedy in which Dryden, trusting too confidently to this last element of success, pushed grossness to the utmost conceivable limit, was hissed off the stage. In tragedy, it is true, his position was more firm. But even in this department, some niches were cut in the body of his fame. His friend, Nat. Lee, had produced one or two tragedies in which a tenderness and a wild force of passion were discerned, to which Dryden's more masculine genius could not pretend; Crowne had also done one or two things of a superior character; and, though it was not till 1682 that Otway produced his *Venice Preserved*, he had already given evidence of his mastery of dramatic pathos. All this Dryden might have seen without allowing himself to be much concerned, conscious as he must have been that in general strength he was still superior to all about him, however they might rival him in particulars. The deliberate resolution, however, of Rochester and some other aristocratic leaders of the fashion, to make good their criticisms on his



writings, by setting up first one and then another of the dramatists of the day as patterns of a higher style of art than his, provoked him out of his composure. To show what he could do, if called upon to defend his rights against pretenders, he made a terrible example of one poor wretch, who had been puffed for the moment into undue popularity. This unfortunate was Elkanah Settle, and the occasion of the attack was a heroic tragedy written by Settle, acted with great success both on the stage and at Whitehall, and published with illustrative woodcuts. On this performance Dryden made a most merciless onslaught in a prose-criticism prefixed to his next published play, tearing Settle's metaphors and grammar to pieces. Settle replied with some spirit, but little effect, and was, in fact, settled for ever. Rochester next patronized Crowne and Otway for a time, but soon gave them up, and contented himself with assailing Dryden more directly in such lampoons as we have quoted. In the year 1679, however, suspecting Dryden to have had a share in the authorship of a poem, then circulating in manuscript; in which certain liberties were taken with his name, he caused him to be way-laid and beaten as he was going home one evening through Rose-alley to his house in Gerard-street. The poem, entitled *An Essay on Satire*, is usually printed among Dryden's works; but it remains uncertain whether Dryden was really the author.

It was fortunate for Dryden and for English literature that, just about this period, when he was beginning to be regarded as a veteran among the dramatists, whose farther services in that department the town could afford to spare, circumstances led him, almost without any wish of his own, into a new path of literature. He was now arrived at the ripe age of fifty years, and, if an inventory had been made of his writings, they would have been found to consist of twenty-one dramas, with a series of critical prose-essays for the most part bound up with these dramas, and nothing in the nature of non-dramatic poetry, except a few occasional pieces, of which the *Annus Mirabilis* was still the chief. Had a discerning critic examined these works with a view to discover in what peculiar vein of verse, Dryden, if he abandoned the drama, might

still do justice to his powers, he would certainly have selected the vein of reflective satire. Of the most nervous and emphatic lines that could have been quoted from his plays a large proportion would have been found to consist of what may be called *maxim* metrically expressed; while, in his dramatic prologues and epilogues, which were always thought among the happiest efforts of his pen, the excellence would have been found to consist in very much the same power of direct didactic declamation applied satirically to the humours, manners, and opinions of the day. Whether any critic, observing all this, would have been bold enough to advise Dryden to take the hint, and quit the drama for satirical, controversial, and didactic poetry, we need not inquire. Circumstances compelled what advice might have failed to bring about. After some twenty years of political stagnation, or rather of political confusion, relieved only by the occasional cabals of leading statesmen, and by rumours of Catholic and Protestant plots, the old Puritan feeling and the general spirit of civil liberty, which the Restoration had but pent up within the vitals of England, broke forth in a regular and organized form as modern English Whiggism. The controversy had many ramifications, but its immediate phase at that moment was an antagonism of two parties on the question of the succession to the crown after Charles should die—the Tories and Catholics maintaining the rights of the Duke of York as the legal heir; and the Whigs and Protestants rallying, for want of a better man, round Charles's illegitimate son, the handsome and popular Duke of Monmouth, then a puppet in the hands of Shaftesbury, the recognised leader of the opposition. Charles himself was forced by reasons of state to take part with his brother, and to frown on Monmouth; but this did not prevent the lords and wits of the time from distributing themselves pretty equally between the two parties, and fighting out the dispute with all the weapons of intrigue and ridicule. Shadwell, Settle, and some other minor poets, lent their pens to the Whigs, and wrote squibs and satires in the Whig service. Lee, Otway, Tate, and others, worked for the Court party. Dryden, as laureate and Tory, had but one

course to take. He plunged into the controversy with the whole force of his genius; and in November, 1681, when the nation was waiting for the trial of Shaftesbury, then a prisoner in the Tower, he published his satire of *Absalom and Achitophel*, in which, under the thin veil of a story of Absalom's rebellion against his father David, the existing political state of England was represented from the Tory point of view. Among the characters portrayed in it, Dryden had the satisfaction of introducing his old critic, the Duke of Buckingham, upon whom he now took ample revenge.

The satire of *Absalom and Achitophel*, than which nothing finer of the kind had ever appeared in England, and which indeed surpassed all that could have been expected even from Dryden at that time, was the first of a series of polemical or satirical poems the composition of which occupied the last eight years of his laureateship. *The Medul, a Satire against Sedition*, appeared in March, 1682, as the poet's comment on the popular enthusiasm occasioned by the acquittal of Shaftesbury; *Mac Flecknoe*, in which Shadwell, as poet-in-chief of the Whigs, received a thrashing all to himself, was published in October in the same year; and, a month later, there appeared the so-called *Second Part of Absalom and Achitophel*, written by Nahum Tate, under Dryden's superintendence, and with interpolations from Dryden's pen. In the same avowed character, as literary champion of the government and the party of the Duke of York, Dryden continued to labour during the remainder of the reign of Charles. His *Religio Laici*, indeed, produced early in 1683, and forming a metrical statement of the grounds and extent of his own attachment to the Church of England, can hardly have been destined for immediate political service. But the solitary play which he wrote about this period—a tragedy called *The Duke of Guise*—was certainly intended for political effect; as was also a translation from the French of a work on the history of French Calvinism.

How ill requited Dryden was for these services appears but too clearly from evidence proving that, at this time, he was in great pecuniary difficulties. At the time when the

king's cast-off mistresses were receiving pensions of 10,000*l.* a-year, and when 130,000*l.*, or more, was squandered every year on secret court-purposes, Dryden's salary as laureate remained unpaid for four years; and when, in consequence of his repeated solicitations, an order for part-payment of the arrears was at last issued in May, 1684, it was for the miserable pittance of one quarter's salary, due at midsummer, 1680, leaving fifteen quarters, or 750*l.* still in arrears. It appears, however, from a document published for the first time by Mr. Bell, that an additional pension of 100*l.* a-year was at this time conferred on Dryden—that pension to date retrospectively from 1680, and the arrears to be paid, as convenient, along with the larger arrears of salary. How far Dryden benefited by this nominal increase of his emoluments from government, or whether any further portion of the arrears was paid up, while Charles continued on the throne, can hardly be ascertained. Charles died in February, 1684-5, and Dryden, as in duty bound, wrote his funeral panegyric. In this Pindaric, which is entitled *Threnodia Augustalis*, the poet seems to hint, as delicately as the occasion would permit, at the limited extent of his pecuniary obligations to the deceased monarch.

“ As, when the new-born phoenix takes his way,  
 His rich paternal regions to survey,  
 Of airy choristers a numerous train  
 Attends his wondrous progress o'er the plain;  
 So, rising from his father's urn,  
 So glorious did our Charles return.  
 The officious muses came along—  
 A gay harmonious choir, like angels ever young;  
 The muse, that mourns him now, his happy triumph sung.  
 Even they could thrive in his auspicious reign;  
 And such a plenteous crop they bore  
 Of purest and well-winnowed grain,  
 As Britain never knew before;  
 Though little was their hire, and light their gain,  
 Yet somewhat to their share he threw.  
 Fed from his hand, they sung and flew,  
 Like birds of Paradise, that lived on morning dew.  
 Oh, never let their lays his name forget!  
 The pension of a prince's praise is great.”

If there was any literary man in whose favour James II. on his accession, might have been expected to relax his parsimonious habits, it was Dryden. The poet had praised him and made a hero of him for twenty years, and had, during



the last four years, been working for him incessantly. In acknowledgment of these services, James could not do otherwise than continue him in the laureateship; but this was all that he seemed inclined to do. In the new patent issued for the purpose, not only was there no renewal of the deceased king's private grant of 100*l.* a-year, but even the annual butt of sherry, hitherto forming part of the laureate's allowance, was discontinued, and the salary limited to the precise money payment of 200*l.* a-year. If, as is probable, the salary was now more punctually paid than it had been under Charles, the reduction may have been of less consequence. In March, 1685-6, however, James opened his purse, and, by fresh letters patent, conferred on Dryden a permanent additional salary of 100*l.* a-year, thus raising the annual income of the laureateship to 300*l.* The explanation of this unusual piece of liberality on the part of James, has been generally supposed to lie in the fact that, in the course of the preceding year, Dryden had proved the thorough and unstinted character of his loyalty, by declaring himself a convert to the king's religion. That Dryden's passing over to the Catholic church was contemporaneous with the increase of his pension, is a fact; but what may have been the exact relation between the two events is a question which one ought to be cautious in answering. Mr. Macaulay's view of the case is harsh enough. "Finding," he says, "that if he continued to call himself a Protestant, his services would be overlooked, he declared himself a Papist. The king's parsimony instantly relaxed. Dryden was gratified with a pension of one hundred pounds a-year, and was employed to defend his new religion both in prose and verse." Sir Walter Scott's view is more charitable, and, we believe, more just. He regards Dryden's conversion as having been, in the main, honest to the extent professed by himself, though his situation and expectations may have cooperated to effect it. In support of this view Mr. Bell points out the fact that the pension granted by James, was, after all, only a renewal of a pension granted by Charles, and which, not being secured by letters patent, had lapsed on that king's decease. Dryden, it is also to be remarked, remained

sufficiently staunch to his new faith during the rest of his life, and seems even to have felt a kind of comfort in it. Probably, therefore, the true state of the case is, that conformity to the Catholic religion, at the time when Dryden embraced it, was the least troublesome mode of systematizing for his own mind a number of diverse speculations, personal and political, that were then perplexing him; and that, afterwards, in consequence of the very obloquy which his change of religion drew upon him from all quarters, he hugged his new creed more closely, so as to coil round him, for the first time in his life, a few threads of private theological conviction. This is not very different from the notion entertained by Sir Walter Scott, who argues that Dryden's conversion was not, except in outward profession, a change from Protestant to Catholic belief, but rather like that of Gibbon, a choice of Catholicism as the most convenient resting-place for a mind tired of Pyrrhonism, and disposed to cut short the process of emancipation from it by taking a decisive step at once.

At all events, Dryden showed sufficient polemical energy in the service of the religion which he had adopted. He became James's literary factotum, the defender in prose and in verse of the worst measures of his rule; and was ready to do battle with Stillingfleet, Burnet, or any one else that dared to use a pen on the other side. As if to make the highest display of his powers as a versifier at a time when his character as a man was lowest, he published, in 1687, his controversial allegory of *The Hind and the Panther*, by far the largest and most elaborate of all his original poems. In this poem, in which the various churches and sects of the day figure as beasts—the Church of Rome as a “milk-white hind,” innocent and unchanged; the Church of England as a “panther,” spotted, but still beautiful; Presbyterianism as a haggard ugly “wolf;” Independency as the “bloody bear;” the Baptists as the “bristled boar;” the Unitarians as the “false fox;” the Freethinkers as the “buffoon ape;” and the Quakers as the timid “hare”—Dryden showed that, whatever his new faith had done for him, it had not changed his genius for satire. In fact, precisely as during the reign of James,



Dryden appears personally as a solitary giant, warring on the wrong side, so this poem remains as the sole literary work of any excellence in which the wretched spirit of that reign is fully represented. Dryden himself, as if he had thrown all his force into it, wrote little else in verse till the year 1688, when, on the occasion of the birth of James's son, afterwards the Pretender, he made himself the spokesman of the exulting Catholics, and published his *Britannia Rediviva*.

" See how the venerable infant lies  
In early pomp; how through the mother's eyes  
The father's soul, with an undaunted view,  
Looks out, and takes our homage as his due.  
See on his future subjects how he smiles,  
Nor meanly flatters, nor with craft beguiles;  
But with an open face, as on his throne,  
Assures our birthrights, and secures his own."

Within a few months after these lines were written, the father, the mother, and the baby were turned out of England; Dutch William was king; and the Whigs had it all to themselves. Dryden, as a matter of course, had to give up the laureateship; and, as William had but a small choice of poets, Shadwell was the person put in his place.

The concluding period of Dryden's career, extending from the Revolution to his death in 1700, exhibits him as a Tory patriarch lingering in the midst of a Whig generation, and still, despite the change of dynasty, retaining his literary pre-eminence. For a while, of course, he was under a cloud; but after it had passed away, he was at liberty to make his own terms with the public. The country, indeed, could have no literature except what he and such as he chose to furnish. Locke, Sir William Temple, and others were now in a position to bring forward speculations smothered during the previous reigns, and to scatter seeds that might spring up in new literary forms. Burnet, Tillotson, and others might represent Whiggism in the church. But all the literary men, especially such, whose services were available at the beginning of the new reign, were men who, whatever might be their voluntary relations to the new order of things, had been more or less trained in the school of the Restoration, and accustomed to the supremacy of Dryden. The Earl of Rochester, the

Earl of Roscommon, the Duke of Buckingham, Etherege, the dramatist, and poor Otway, were dead; but Shadwell, Settle, Lee, Crowne, Tate, Wycherley, the Earl of Dorset, Tom D'Urfey, and Sir Charles Sedley, were still alive. Shadwell, coarse and fat as ever, enjoyed the laureateship till his death, in 1692, when Nahum Tate was appointed to succeed him. Settle had degenerated into the City showman. Lee, liberated from Bedlam, continued to write tragedies till April, 1692, when he tumbled over a bulk going home drunk at night through Clare Market, and was killed or stifled among the snow. Little starched Johnny Crowne kept up the respectability of his character. Wycherley lived as a man of fashion about town, and wrote no more. Sedley and the Earl of Dorset were also idle; and Tom D'Urfey made small witticisms, and called them "pills to purge melancholy." Among such men Dryden, so long as he cared to be seen among them, held necessarily his old place. Nor were there any of the younger men, as yet known, in whom the critics recognised, or who recognised in themselves, any title to renounce allegiance to the ex-laureate. Thomas Southerne had begun his prolific career as a dramatist in 1682, when Dryden furnished him with a prologue to his first play; but, though after the Revolution he made more money by his dramas than ever Dryden had made by his, he was ashamed to admit the fact to Dryden himself. Matthew Prior, twenty-four years of age at the Revolution, had made his first literary appearance before it, in no less important a character than that of one of Dryden's political antagonists; but though *The Town and Country Mouse* had been a decided hit, and Dryden himself was said to have winced under it, no one pretended that the author was anything more than a clever young man, who had sat in Dryden's company, and turned his opportunities to account. Five years after the Revolution, Congreve produced his first comedy at the age of twenty-four; but it was Congreve's greatest boast in after life, that that comedy had won him the warm praises of Dryden, and laid the foundation of the extraordinary friendship which had subsisted between them during Dryden's last years, when they used to walk

together and dine together as father and son. During these last years Dryden, had he been willing to see merit in any other comedies than those of his young friend Congreve, might have hailed his equal in Vanbrugh, and his superior in Farquhar, then beginning to write for the stage. Among their coevals, destined to some distinction, he might have marked Colley Cibber, Nicholas Rowe, and John Philips, the pleasing parodist of Milton. Of the epics of Blackmore he had quite enough ; at least three of those immense performances having been given to the world before Dryden died. At the time of Dryden's death, his kinsman, Jonathan Swift, was thirty-three years of age ; Richard Steele was thirty ; Daniel Defoe was thirty ; Addison was twenty-nine ; Shaftesbury, the essayist, was twenty-nine ; Bolingbroke was twenty-two ; and Parnell the poet, twenty-one. With these men a new literary movement was to take its origin ; but they had hardly yet begun their work ; and there was not one of them, Swift excepted, that would not, in the height of his subsequent fame, have been proud to acknowledge his obligations to Dryden. Alexander Pope, the next Englishman that was to take a place in general literature as high, or nearly as high as that occupied by Dryden, had been born only in the year of the Revolution, and was consequently but a precocious boy of twelve when Dryden left the scene. *Virgilium tantum vidit*, as he used himself to say.

Living, a hale patriarch, among these newer men, Dryden partly influenced them, and was partly influenced by them. On the one hand, it was from his chair in Will's Coffee-house that those literary decrees were issued which still ruled the judgment of the town ; and for a young author, on visiting Will's, to receive a pinch from Dryden's snuff-box, was equivalent to his formal admission into that society of wits. On the other hand, the times were so changed and the men were so changed, that Dryden, dictator as he was, had to yield in some points, and defend himself in others. His cousin Swift, whom he had offended by an unfavourable judgment given in private on some of his poems, was the only man who would have made a wholesale attack upon his literary reputation ;

but the moral character of his writings was a subject on which adverse criticism was likely to be more general. At first, indeed, there was little perceptible improvement in the moral tone of the literature of the Revolution, as compared with that of the Restoration—the elder dramatists, such as Shadwell, still writing in the fashion to which they had been accustomed; and the younger ones, such as Congreve and Vanbrugh, deeming it a point of honour to be as immoral as their predecessors. In the course of a few years, however, what with the influence of a Whig court, what with other causes, a purer and more delicate taste crept in; and people became ashamed of what their fathers had delighted in. Dryden lived to see the beginnings of this important change, and, with many expressions of regret for his own past delinquencies in this respect, to welcome the appearance of a chaster literature.

Those of Dryden's writings, which were produced during the twelve years of his life subsequent to the Revolution, constitute an important part of his literary remains, not merely in point of bulk, but also in respect of a certain general peculiarity of their character. They may be described as for the most part belonging to the department of pure, as distinct from that of controversial, literature. Dryden did not indeed wholly abandon satire and controversy after the Revolution; but his aim after that period seemed rather to be to produce such literature as would at once be acceptable to the public, and earn for himself the most money with the least trouble. Deprived of his laureateship, and so rendered almost entirely dependent on his pen, at a time when age was creeping upon him, and the expenses of his family were greater than ever, he was obliged to make considerations of economy paramount in his choice of work. As was natural, he fell back at first on the drama; and his five last plays, two of which are tragedies, one an opera, and two comedies, were all produced between 1689 and 1694. The profits of these dramas, however, were insufficient, and he was obliged to eke them out by all those devices of dedication to private noblemen, execution of literary commissions for elegiac poems and the like, which then formed part of the professional author's means of liveli-

hood. Sums of 50*l.*, 100*l.*, and even, in one or two cases, 500*l.*, were earned by Dryden in this disagreeable way from earls, squires, and clubs of gentlemen. His poem of *Eleonora* was a 500*l.* commission, executed for the Earl of Abingdon, who wanted a poem in memory of his deceased wife, and, without knowing anything of Dryden personally, applied to him to write it; just as now, in a similar case, a commission might be given to a popular sculptor for a *post mortem* statue. In spite of the utmost allowance for the custom of the time, no one, knowing the circumstances, can read the poem now without absolute disgust; and, unwilling as we are to think so, it does show a certain lowness of mind in Dryden to have been able, under any pressure of necessity, to write for hire such extravagances as that poem contains respecting a person he had never seen. Far more honourable were Dryden's earnings from work done for Jacob Tonson, the publisher. His dealings with Tonson had begun before the Revolution; but, after the Revolution, Tonson was his mainstay. First came several volumes of miscellanies, consisting of select poems, published and unpublished, with scraps of prose and translation. Then, catching at the hint furnished by the success of some of the scraps of translation from the Latin and Greek poets, Dryden and Tonson found it mutually advantageous to prosecute that vein. Juvenal and Persius were translated under Dryden's care; and in 1697, after three years of labour, he gave to the world his completed translation of *Virgil*. Looking about for a task to succeed this, he undertook to furnish Tonson with so many thousand lines of narrative verse, to be published under the title of *Fables*. Where the fables came from Tonson did not care, provided they would sell; and Dryden, with his rapid powers of versification, soon produced versions of some tales of Chaucer and Boccaccio which answered the purpose exceedingly well. They were printed in 1699. Of the other poems written by Dryden in his last years, his *Alexander's Feast* is the most celebrated. He continued his literary labours till within a few days of his death, which happened on the 1st of May, 1700.

When we inquire what it is that makes Dryden's name so important as to entitle it to rank, as it seems to do, the fifth in the series of great English poets after Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, we find that it is nothing else than the fact, brought out in the preceding sketch, that, steadily and industriously, for a period of forty-two years, he kept in the front of the national literature, such as it then was. It is because he represents the entire literary development of the Restoration; it is because he fills up, as it were, the whole interval between 1658 and 1700—thus connecting the age of Puritanism and Milton, with the age of the Queen Anne wits—that we give him such a place in such a list. The reason is a chronological one, rather than one of strict comparison of personal merits. Though we place Dryden fifth in the list after Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, it is not necessarily because we regard him as the co-equal of those men in genius; it is only because, passing onward in time, his is the next name of very distinguished magnitude after theirs. Personally there is no one that would compare Dryden with Shakespeare or Milton; and perhaps there are not many now that would compare him with Chaucer or Spenser. On the whole, if the estimate be one of general intellectual strength, he takes rank only with the first of the second class, as with the Jonsons, the Fletchers, and others of the Elizabethan age; while if the estimate have regard to genuine poetic or imaginative power, he sinks below even these. Yet, if historical reasons only are regarded, Dryden has perhaps a better right to his place in the list than any of the others. At least as strictly as Chaucer is the representative of the English literature of the latter half of the fourteenth century, far more strictly than Spenser and Shakespeare are the representatives of the literature of their times, and in a more broad and obvious manner than Milton is the literary representative of the Commonwealth, Dryden represents the literary activity of the reigns of Charles and James, and of the greater part of that of King William. Davenant, Butler, Waller, Etherege, Otway, Wycherley, Southerne, Prior, and Congreve, are names leading us piece-



meal, as it were, over the same period, and illustrating perhaps more exquisitely than Dryden some of its individual characteristics; but for a solid representative of the period as a whole, resuming in himself all its more prominent characteristics in one substantial aggregate, we are obliged to take Dryden. Twelve years of his literary life he laboured as a strong junior among the Davenants, the Butlers, and the Wallers, qualifying himself to set them aside; eighteen years more were spent in acknowledged lordship over the Ethereges, Otways, and Wycherleys, who occupied the middle of the period; and during the twelve concluding years, he was a patriarch among the Southernes, and Priors, and Congreves, in whose lives the period wove itself into the next.

And yet, personally, as well as historically, Dryden is a man of no mean importance. Not only is he the largest figure in one epoch of our literature; he is a very considerable figure also in our literature as a whole. To begin with the most obvious, but at the same time not the least noteworthy of his claims, the *quantity* of his contributions to our literature was large. He was a various and voluminous writer. In Scott's collected edition of his works, they fill seventeen octavo volumes. About seven of these volumes consist of dramas, with accompanying prefaces and dedications, the number of dramas being in all twenty-eight. Two volumes more embrace the polemical poems, the satires, and the poems of contemporary historical allusion, written chiefly between 1681 and 1683. One volume is filled with odes, songs, and lyrical pieces, written at various times. The fables, or metrical tales, redacted in his old age from Chaucer and Boccaccio, occupy a volume and a half. Three volumes and a half are devoted to the translations from the classic poets, including Virgil. The remaining two volumes consist of miscellaneous prologues, epilogues, and witty pieces of verse, and of miscellaneous prose-writings, original and translated, including the critical essay on dramatic poetry. Considered as a whole, the matter of the seventeen volumes is a goodly contribution from one man as respects both extent and variety. Spread over forty-two years, it does not argue that excessive industry

which Scott, of all men in the world, has found in it; but it fairly entitles Dryden to take his place among those writers who deserve regard for the quantity of their writings, in addition to whatever regard they may be entitled to on the score of quality. And it is a fact worth noting, that most writers who have taken a high place in literature have been voluminous—have not only written well, but have written much. There are two ways, also, of writing much. One may write much variously, or one may write much all of one kind. Dryden was various as well as voluminous.

Of all that Dryden wrote, however, there is but a comparatively small portion that has won for itself a permanent place in our literature; and in this Dryden differs from other writers who have been equally voluminous. In other words, it is a significant circumstance about Dryden that the proportion of that part of his matter which survives, or deserves to survive, to that part which was squandered away on the age it was first written for, and there ended, is unusually small. In Shakespeare, there is very little that is felt to be of such inferior quality as not to be worth reading in due time and place. In Milton, there is, if we consider only his poetry, still less. All Chaucer, almost, is felt to be worth preservation by those who like Chaucer; all Wordsworth, almost, by those who like Wordsworth. But, except for library purposes, there is no admirer of Dryden that would care to save more than a small select portion of what he wrote. His satires and polemical poems; one or two of his odes; his translation of Virgil; his fables; one of his comedies, and one of his tragedies, by way of specimen of his dramatic powers; a complete set of his prologues, for the sake of their allusions to contemporary manners and humours; and a few pieces of his prose, to show his style of criticism—these would together form a collection not much more than a fourth part of the whole, and which would require to be yet farther winnowed, were the purpose to leave only what was sterling and in Dryden's best manner. Mr. Bell's edition, which comprises in three volumes all Dryden's original non-dramatic poetry, and the best collection of his prologues and

epilogues yet made, is itself a surfeit of matter. It is exactly such an edition of Dryden as ought to be included in a series of the English poets intended to be complete; but even in it there is more of dross than of ore.

What is the reason of this? How is it that in Dryden, the proportion of what is now rubbish to what is still precious as a literary possession is so much greater than in most other writers of great celebrity? There are two reasons for it. The first is, that originally, and in its own nature, much of the matter that Dryden put forth was not of a kind for which his genius was fitted. Whatever his own imagination constructed on the large scale was mean and conventional. Wherever, as in his translations of Virgil and his imitations of Chaucer and Boccaccio, he employed his powers of language and verse in refurbishing matter invented by others, the poetical substance of his writings is valuable; but the sheer produce of his own imagination, as in his dramas, is in general such stuff as nature disowns, and no creature can take pleasure in. There is no fine power of dramatic story, no exquisite invention of character or circumstance, no truth to nature in ideal landscape: at the utmost, there is conventional dramatic situation, with an occasional flash of splendid dubious imagery such as may be struck out in the heat of heroic declamation. Thus—

"I am as free as Nature first made man,  
Ere the base laws of servitude began,  
When wild in woods the noble savage ran."

Dryden's natural powers, as all his critics have remarked, lay not so much in the imaginative as in the didactic, the declamatory, and the ratiocinative. What Johnson claims for him, and what seems to have been claimed for him in his own lifetime, was the credit of being one of the best reasoners in verse that ever wrote. Mr. Macaulay means very much the same thing when he calls Dryden a great "critical poet," and the founder of the "critical school of English poetry." Probably Milton meant something of the kind, when he said that Dryden was a rhymers, but no poet. It was in declamatory and didactic rhyme, with all that could consist with

it, that Dryden excelled. It was in the metrical utterance of weighty sentences, in the metrical conduct of an argument, in vehement satirical invective, and in such passages of lyric passion as depended for their effect on rolling grandeur of sound, that he was pre-eminently great. Even his imagination worked more powerfully, and his perceptions of physical circumstance became keener and truer, under the influence of polemical rage, the pursuit of terse maxim, or the passion for sonorous declamation. Thus—

“ And every shekel which he can receive  
Shall cost a limb of his prerogative.”

Or, in his character of Shaftesbury,—

“ Of these the false Achitophel was first :  
A name to all succeeding ages curst ;  
For close designs and crooked counsels fit ;  
Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit ;  
Restless, unfix'd in principles and place ;  
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace ;  
A fiery soul, which, working out its way,  
Fretted the pigmy body to decay,  
And o'er-inform'd the tenement of clay.  
A daring pilot in extremity,  
Pleased with the danger when the waves went high,  
He sought the storms ; but, for a calm unfit,  
Would steer too nigh the sands, to boast his wit.  
Great wits are sure to madness near allied,  
And thin partitions do their bounds divide.”

Or, in the lines which he sent to Tonson the publisher as a specimen of what he could do in the way of portrait-painting, if Tonson did not send him supplies—

“ With leering looks, bull-faced, and freckled fair,  
With two left legs, and Judas-coloured hair,  
And frowzy pores, that taint the ambient air.”

And, again, in every passage in the noble ode on Alexander's Feast, as thus—

“ With ravished ears  
The monarch hears ;  
Assumes the god,  
Affects to nod,  
And seems to shake the spheres.”

In satire, in critical disquisition, in aphoristic verse, or in lyrical grandiloquence, Dryden was in his natural element ; and one reason why, of all the matter of his voluminous works, so small a portion is of permanent literary value, is

that, in his attempts after literary variety, he could not or would not restrict himself within these proper limits of his genius.

But, besides this, Dryden was a slovenly worker within his own field. Even of what he could do best, he did little continuously in a thoroughly careful manner. In his best poem, there are not twenty consecutive lines without some logical incoherence, some confusion of metaphor, some inaccuracy of language, or some evident strain of the meaning for the sake of the metre. His strength lies in passages and weighty interspersed lines, not in whole poems. Even in Dryden's lifetime this complaint was made. It was hinted at in *The Rehearsal*; Rochester speaks of Dryden's "slattern muse;" and Blackmore, who criticised Dryden in his old age, expresses the common opinion distinctly and deliberately—

" Into the melting-pot when Dryden comes,  
What horrid stench will rise, what noisome fumes !  
How will he shrink, when all his lewd allay,  
And wicked mixture, shall be purged away ?  
When once his boasted heaps are melted down,  
A chest-full scarce will yield one sterling crown ;  
But what remains will be so pure, 'twill bear  
The examination of the most severe."

This is true, though it was Blackmore who said it. We think, however, that Dryden's slovenliness consisted not so much in a disposition to spare pains, as in a constitutional robustness which rendered artistic perfection all but impossible to him, even when he laboured hardest to attain it. Our notion of Dryden is that he was originally a *robust* man, who, when he first engaged in poetry, could produce nothing better than strong stanzas of rather wooden sound and mechanism; who, by dint of perseverance and continual work, however, drilled his genius into higher susceptibility, and a conscious aptitude and mastery in certain directions; and who, the older he grew, became mellowed, more musical, and more imaginative, simply because what had been robustness at first had by long practice been subdued and welded into flexibility and nerve. It is stated of Dryden, that in his earlier life, at least, he used, as a preparation for writing, to induce on him-

self an artificial state of languor, by taking medicine or letting blood. The trait, we think, is characteristic. Dryden's whole literary career was but a metaphor of it. Had he died before 1670, or even before 1681, when his *Annus Mirabilis* was still his most ambitious production, he would have been remembered as little more than a robust versifier; but, living as he did till 1700, he performed work which has entitled him to rank among English poets. As a contributor to the actual body of our literature, and as a man who produced by his influence a lasting effect on its literary methods, Dryden's place is certainly high; and we are glad to see a new edition of his poems so admirably edited, and put forth under such good auspices.

*See a Letter of Wordsworth's to  
Sir Walter Scott, in Lockhart's  
Life of Sir W. C. ii. 80.*



## DEAN SWIFT.\*

1688  
1727

IN dividing the history of English literature into periods, it is customary to take the interval between the year 1688 and the year 1727 as constituting one of those periods. This interval includes the reigns of William III., Anne, and George I. If we do not bind ourselves too precisely to the year 1727 as closing the period, the division is proper enough. There *are* characteristics about the time thus marked out, which distinguish it from previous and from subsequent portions of our literary history. Dryden, Locke, and some other notabilities of the Restoration, lived into this period, and may be regarded as partly belonging to it; but the names more peculiarly representing it are those of Swift, Burnet, Addison, Steele, Pope, Shaftesbury, Gay, Arbuthnot, Atterbury, Prior, Parnell, Bolingbroke, Congreve, Vanbrugh, Farquhar, Rowe, Defoe, and Cibber. The names in this cluster disperse themselves over the three reigns which the period includes, some of them having already been known as early as the accession of William, while others survived the first George, and continued to add to their celebrity during the reign of his successor; but the most brilliant portion of the period was from 1702 to 1714 or thereby, when Queen Anne was on the throne. Hence the name of "wits of Queen Anne's reign," commonly applied to the writers of the whole period.

A while ago this used to be spoken of as the golden or Augustan age of English literature. We do not talk in that manner now. We feel that when we get among the authors of the times of Queen Anne and the first George, we are

\* BRITISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, October, 1854. — 1. *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*. A Series of Lectures. By W. M. THACKERAY. London: 1853.

2. *The Life of Swift*. By SIR WALTER SCOTT. Edinburgh: 1848.

x See Warton's Essay on Pope, i. 1524 - Ed. 1806,

among very pleasant and very clever men, but by no means among giants. In coming down to this period from those going before it, we have an immediate sensation of having left the region of "greatness" behind us. We still find plenty of good writing, characterised by certain qualities of trimness, artificial grace, and the like, to a degree not before attained; here and there also, we discern something like real power and strength, breaking through the prevailing element; but, on the whole, there is an absence of what, except by a compromise of language, could be called "great." It is the same whether we regard largeness of imaginative faculty, loftiness of moral spirit, or vigour of speculative capacity, as principally concerned in imparting the character of "greatness" to literature. What of genius in the ideal survived the seventeenth century in England, contented itself with nice little imaginations of scenes and circumstances connected with the artificial life of the time; the moral quality most in repute was kindness or courtesy; and speculation did not go beyond that point where thought retains the form either of ordinary good sense, or of keen momentary wit. No sooner, in fact, do we pass the time of Milton, than we feel that we have done with the sublimities. A kind of lumbering largeness does remain in the intellectual gait of Dryden and his contemporaries, as if the age still wore the armour of the old literary forms, though not at home in it; but in Pope's days, even the affectation of the "great" had ceased. Not slowly to build up a grand poem of continuous ideal action, not quietly and at leisure to weave forth tissues of fantastic imagery, not perseveringly and laboriously to prosecute one track of speculation and bring it to a close, not earnestly and courageously to throw one's whole soul into a work of moral agitation and reform, was now what was regarded as natural in literature. On the contrary, he was a wit, or a literary man, who, living in the midst of the social bustle, or on the skirts of it, could throw forth in the easiest manner, little essays, squibs, and *jeux d'esprit*, pertinent to the rapid occasions of the hour, and never tasking the mind too long or too much. This was the time when that great distinction between Whiggism and Toryism, which, for a

century-and-a-half has existed in Great Britain as a kind of permanent social condition, affecting the intellectual activity of all natives from the moment of their birth, first began to be practically operative. It has, on the whole, been a wretched thing for the mind of England to have had this necessity of being either a Whig or a Tory put so prominently before it. Perhaps, in all times, some similar necessity of taking one side or the other in some current form of controversy has afflicted the leading minds, and tormented the more genial among them; but we question if ever in this country in previous times there was a form of controversy, so little to be identified, in real reason, with the one only true controversy between good and evil, and so capable, therefore, of breeding confusion and mischief, when so identified in practice, as this poor controversy of Whig and Tory which came in with the Revolution. To be called upon to be either a Puritan or a Cavalier—there was some possibility of complying with *that* call, and still leading a tolerably free and large intellectual life; though possibly it was one cause of the rich mental development of the Elizabethan epoch that the men of that time were exempt from any personal obligation of attending even to this distinction. But, to be called upon to be either a Whig or a Tory—why, how on earth can one retain any of the larger humanities about him, if society is to hold him by the neck between two stools such as these, pointing alternately to the one and to the other, and incessantly asking him on which of the two he means to sit? Into a mind trained to regard adhesiveness to one or other of these stools as the first rule of duty or of prudence, what thoughts of any high interest can find their way? Or, if any such do find their way, how are they to be adjusted to so mean a rule? Now-a-days, our higher spirits solve the difficulty by kicking both stools down, and plainly telling society that they will not bind themselves to sit on either, or even on both put together. Hence partly it is that, in recent times, we have had renewed specimens of the “great” or “sublime” in literature—the poetry, for example, of a Byron, a Wordsworth, or a Tennyson. But, in the interval between 1688 and 1727, there was not one wit alive whom

society let off from the necessity of being, and declaring himself, either a Whig or a Tory. Constitutionally, and by circumstances, Pope was the man who could have most easily obtained the exemption; but even Pope professed himself a Tory. Addison and Steele were Whigs. In short, every literary man was bound, by the strongest of all motives, to keep in view, as a permanent fact qualifying his literary undertakings, the distinction between Whiggism and Toryism, and to give to at least a considerable part of his writings the character of pamphlets or essays in the service of his party. To minister by the pen to the occasions of Whiggism and Toryism was, therefore, the main business of the wits both in prose and in verse. Out of these occasions of ministration there of course arose personal quarrels, and these furnished fresh opportunities to the men of letters. Critics of previous writings could be satirized and lampooned, and thus the circle of subjects was widened. Moreover, there was abundant matter, capable of being treated consistently with either Whiggism or Toryism, in the social foibles and peculiarities of the day, as we see in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. Nor could a genial mind like that of Steele, a man of taste and fine thought like Addison, and an intellect so keen, exquisite, and sensitive as that of Pope, fail to variegate and surround all the duller and harder literature thus called into being, with more lasting touches of the humorous, the fanciful, the sweet, the impassioned, the meditative, and the ideal. Thus from one was obtained the character of a *Sir Roger de Coverley*, from another a *Vision of Mirza*, and from the third a *Windsor Forest*, an *Epistle of Heloise*, and much else that delights us still. After all, however, it remains true that the period of English literature now in question, whatever admirable characteristics it may possess, exhibits a remarkable deficiency of what, with recollections of former periods to guide us in our use of epithets, we should call great or sublime.

With the single exception of Pope, and excepting him only out of deference to his peculiar position as the poet or metrical artist of his day, the greatest name in the history of English literature during the early part of last century is that

of Swift. In certain fine and deep qualities, Addison and Steele and perhaps Farquhar excelled him, just as in the succeeding generation Goldsmith had a finer vein of genius than was to be found in Johnson with all his massiveness; but in natural brawn and strength, in original energy and force and imperiousness of brain, he excelled them all. It was about the year 1702, when he was already thirty-five years of age, that this strangest specimen of an Irishman, or of an Englishman born in Ireland, first attracted attention in London literary circles. The scene of his first appearance was Button's coffee-house; the witnesses were Addison, Ambrose Philips, and other wits, belonging to Addison's little senate, who used to assemble there.

"They had for several successive days observed a strange clergyman come into the coffee-house, who seemed utterly unacquainted with any of those who frequented it, and whose custom it was to lay his hat down on a table, and walk backward and forward at a good pace for half an hour or an hour, without speaking to any mortal, or seeming in the least to attend to anything that was going forward there. He then used to take up his hat, pay his money at the bar, and walk away without opening his lips. After having observed this singular behaviour for some time, they concluded him to be out of his senses, and the name that he went by among them, was that of the 'mad parson.' This made them more than usually attentive to his motions; and one evening, as Mr Addison and the rest were observing him, they saw him cast his eyes several times on a gentleman in boots, who seemed to be just come out of the country, and at last advance towards him as intending to address him. They were all eager to hear what this dumb mad parson had to say, and immediately quitted their seats to get near him. Swift went up to the country gentleman, and in a very abrupt manner, without any previous salute, asked him, 'Pray, sir, do you remember any good weather in the world?' The country gentleman, after staring a little at the singularity of his manner, and the oddity of the question, answered, 'Yes, sir, I thank God I remember a great deal of good weather in my time.' 'That is more,' said Swift, 'than I can say; I never remember any weather that was not too hot or too cold, too wet or too dry; but, however God Almighty contrives it, at the end of the year 'tis all very well.' Upon saying this, he took up his hat, and without uttering a syllable more, or taking the least notice of any one, walked out of the coffee-house, leaving all those who had been spectators of this odd scene staring after him, and still more confirmed in the opinion of his being mad."—*Dr. Sheridan's Life of Swift, quoted in Scott's Life.*

If the company present had had sufficient means of information, they would have found that the mad parson with the harsh swarthy features, and eyes "azure as the heavens," whose oddities thus amused them, was Jonathan Swift, then clergyman of Laracor, a rural parish in the diocese of Meath in Ireland. They would have found that he was an Irishman by birth, though of pure English descent; that he could trace



a relationship to Dryden; that, being born after his father's death, he had been educated, at the expense of his relatives, at Trinity College, Dublin; that, leaving Ireland in his twenty-second year, and with but a sorry character from the College authorities, he had been received as a humble dependent into the family of Sir William Temple, at Sheen and Moorpark, near London, that courtly Whig and ex-ambassador being distantly connected with his mother's family; that here, while acting as Sir William's secretary, amanuensis, librarian, and what not, he had begun to write verses and other trifles, some of which he had shown to Dryden, who had told him in reply that they were sad stuff, and that he would never be a poet; that still, being of a restless, ambitious temper, he had not given up hopes of obtaining introduction into public employment in England through Sir William Temple's influence; that, at length, at the age of twenty-eight, despairing of anything better, he had quarrelled with Sir William, returned to Ireland, taken priest's orders, and settled in a living; that again, disgusted with Ireland and his prospects in that country, he had come back to Moorpark, and resided there till 1699, when Sir William's death had obliged him finally to return to Ireland, and accept first a chaplaincy to Lord Justice Berkeley, and then his present living in the diocese of Meath. If curious about the personal habits of this restless Irish parson, they might have found that he had already won the reputation of an eccentric in his own parish and district; performing his parochial duties when at home with scrupulous care, yet by his language and manners often shocking all ideas of clerical decorum, and begetting a doubt as to his sincerity in the religion he professed; boisterous, fierce, overbearing, and insulting to all about him, yet often doing acts of real kindness; exact and economical in his management of money to the verge of actual parsimony, yet, on occasion, spending his money freely, and never without pensioners living on his bounty. They would have found that he was habitually irritable, and that he was subject to a recurring giddiness of the head, or vertigo, which he had brought on, as he thought himself, by a surfeit of fruit while staying with Sir William



Temple, at Sheen. And, what might have been the best bit of gossip of all, they would have found that, though unmarried, and entertaining a most unaccountable and violent aversion to the very idea of marriage, he had taken over to reside with him, or close to his neighbourhood, in Ireland, a certain young and beautiful girl, named Hester Johnson, with whom he had formed an acquaintance in Sir William Temple's house, where she had been brought up, and where, though she passed as a daughter of Sir William's steward, she was believed to be, in reality, a natural daughter of Sir William himself. They would have found that his relations to this girl, whom he had himself educated from her childhood at Sheen and Moorpark, were of a very singular and puzzling kind; that on the one hand she was devotedly attached to him, and on the other he cherished a passionate affection for her, wrote and spoke of her as his "Stella," and liked always to have her near him; yet that a marriage between them seemed not to be thought of by either; and that, in order to have her near him without giving rise to scandal, he had taken the precaution to bring over an elderly maiden lady, called Mrs. Dingley, to reside with her as a companion, and was most careful to be in her society only when this Mrs. Dingley was present.

There was mystery and romance enough, therefore, about the wild, black-browed Irish parson, who attracted the regards of the wits in Button's coffee-house. What had brought him there? That was partly a mystery too; but the mystery would have been pretty well solved if it had been known that, uncouth-looking clerical lout as he was, he was an author like the rest of them, having just written a political pamphlet which was making or was to make a good deal of noise in the world, and having at that moment in his pocket at least one other piece which he was about to publish. The political pamphlet was an *Essay on the Civil Discords in Athens and Rome*, having an obvious bearing on certain dissensions then threatening to break up the Whig party in Great Britain. It was received as a vigorous piece of writing on the ministerial side, and was ascribed by some to Lord Somers, and by

others to Burnet. Swift had come over to claim it, and to see what it and his former connexion with Temple could do for him among the leading Whigs. For the truth was, an ambition equal to his consciousness of power gnawed at the heart of this furious and gifted man, whom a perverse fate had flung away into an obscure vicarage on the wrong side of the channel. His books, his garden, his canal with its willows at Laracor; his dearly-beloved Roger Coxe, and the other perplexed and admiring parishioners of Laracor over whom he domineered; his clerical colleagues in the neighbourhood; and even the society of Stella, the wittiest and best of her sex, whom he loved better than any other creature on earth—all these were insufficient to occupy the craving void in his mind. He hated Ireland, and regarded his lot there as one of banishment; he longed to be in London, and struggling in the centre of whatever was going on. About the date of his appointment to the living of Laracor he had lost the rich deanery of Derry, which Lord Berkeley had meant to give him, in consequence of a notion on the part of the bishop of the diocese that he was a restless, ingenious young man, who, instead of residing, would be “eternally flying backwards and forwards to London.” The bishop’s perception of his character was just. At or about the very time that the wits at Button’s saw him stalking up and down in the coffee-house, the priest of Laracor was introducing himself to Somers, Halifax, Sunderland, and others, and stating the terms on which he would support the Whigs with his pen. Even then, it seems, he took high ground, and let it be known that he was no mere hireling. The following, written at a much later period, is his own explanation of the nature and limits of his Whiggism, at the time when he first offered the Whigs his services:—

“It was then (1701-2) I began to trouble myself with the differences between the principles of Whig and Tory; having formerly employed myself in other, and, I think, much better speculations. I talked often upon this subject with Lord Somers; told him that, having been long conversant with the Greek and Latin authors, and therefore a lover of liberty, I found myself much inclined to be what they call a Whig in politics; and that, besides, I thought it impossible, upon any other principles, to defend or submit to the Revolution; but as to religion, I confessed myself to be a High-Churchman,

and that I could not conceive how any one who wore the habit of a clergyman could be otherwise: that I had observed very well with what insolence and haughtiness some lords of the High Church party treated not only their own chaplains, but all other clergymen whatsoever, and thought this was sufficiently recompensed by their professions of zeal to the Church: that I had likewise observed how the Whig lords took a direct contrary measure, treated the persons of particular clergymen with particular courtesy, but showed much contempt and ill-will for the order in general, that I knew it was necessary for their party to make their bottom as wide as they could, by taking all denominations of Protestants to be members of their body that I would not enter into the mutual reproaches made by the violent men on either side but that the connivance or encouragement given by the Whigs to those writers of pamphlets who reflected upon the whole body of the clergy, without any exception, would unite the Church to one man to oppose them; and that I doubted his lordship's friends did not consider the consequences of this."

Even with these limitations the assistance of so energetic a man as the parson of Laracor was doubtless welcome to the Whigs. His former connexion with the stately old Revolution Whig, Sir William Temple, may have prepared the way for him, as it had already been the means of making him known in some aristocratic families. But there was evidence in his personal bearing and his writings that he was not a man to be neglected. And if there had been any doubt on the subject on his first presentation of himself to ministers, the publication of his *Battle of the Books* and his *Tale of a Tub* in 1703 and 1704 would have set it overwhelmingly at rest. The author of these works (and though they were anonymous, they were at once referred to Swift) could not but be acknowledged as the first prose satirist, and one of the most formidable writers of the age. On his subsequent visits to Button's, therefore—and they were frequent enough; for, as the Bishop of Derry had foreseen, he was often an absentee from his parish—the mad Irish parson was no longer a stranger to the company. Addison, Steele, Tickell, Philips, and the other Whig wits came to know him well, and to feel his weight among them in their daily convivial meetings. "To Dr. Jonathan Swift, the most agreeable companion, the truest friend, and the greatest genius of the age," was the inscription written by Addison on a copy of his *Travels* presented to Swift; and it shows what opinion Addison and those about him had formed of the author of the *Tale of a Tub*.

Thus, passing and repassing between Laracor and London,

now lording it over his Irish parishioners, and now filling the literary and Whig haunts of the great metropolis with the terror of his merciless wit and talk behind his back of his eccentricities and rude manners, Swift spent the interval between 1702 and 1710, or between his thirty-sixth and his forty-fourth year. His position as a High-Church Whig, however, was an anomalous one. In the first place, it was difficult to see how such a man could honestly be in the Church at all. People were by no means strict in those days in their notions of the clerical character; but the *Tale of a Tub* was a strong dose even then to have come from a clergyman. If Voltaire afterwards recommended the book as a masterly satire against religion in general, it cannot be wondered at that an outcry arose among Swift's contemporaries respecting the profanity of the book. It is true, Peter and Jack, as the representatives of Popery and Presbyterianism, came in for the greatest share of the author's scurrility; and Martin, as the representative of the Church of England, was left with the honours of the story: but the whole structure and spirit of the story, to say nothing of the oaths and other irreverences mingled with its language, was well calculated to shock the more serious even of Martin's followers, who could not but see that rank infidelity alone would be a gainer by the book. Accordingly, despite of all that Swift could afterwards do, the fact that he had written this book left a public doubt as to his Christianity. It is quite possible, however, that, with a very questionable kind of belief in Christianity, he may have been a conscientious High-Churchman, zealous for the social defence and aggrandisement of the ecclesiastical institution with which he was connected. Whatever that institution was originally based upon, it existed as part and parcel of the commonwealth of England, rooted in the soil of men's habits and interests, and intertwined with the whole system of social order; and just as a Brahmin, lax enough in his own speculative allegiance to the Brahminical faith, might still desire to maintain Brahminism as a vast pervading establishment in Hindostan, so might Swift, with a heart and a head dubious enough

respecting men's eternal interest in the facts of the Judæan record, see a use notwithstanding in that fabric of bishoprics, deaneries, prebends, parochial livings, and curacies, which ancient belief in those facts had first created and put together. This kind of respect for the Church Establishment is still very prevalent. It is a most excellent thing, it is thought by many, to have a cleanly, cultured, gentlemanly man, invested with authority in every parish throughout the land, who can look after what is going on, fill up schedules, give advice, and take the lead in all parish business. That Swift's faith in the Church included no more than this perception of its uses as a vast administrative and educational establishment, we will not take upon us to say. Mr. Thackeray, indeed, openly avows his opinion that Swift had no belief in the Christian religion. "Swift's," he says, "was a reverent, was a pious spirit—he could love and could pray;" but such religion as he had, Mr. Thackeray hints, was a kind of mad, despairing Deism, and had nothing of Christianity in it. Hence, "having put that cassock on, it poisoned him; he was strangled in his bands." The question thus broached as to the nature of Swift's religion is too deep to be discussed here. Though we would not exactly say, with Mr. Thackeray, that Swift's was a "reverent" and "pious" spirit, there are, as he phrases it, breakings out of "the stars of religion and love" shining in the serene blue through "the driving clouds and the maddened hurricane of Swift's life;" and this, though vague, is about all that we have warrant for saying. As to the zeal of his Churchmanship, however, there is no doubt at all. There was not a man in the British realms more pugnacious in the interests of his order, more resolute in defending the prerogatives of the Church of England against Dissenters and others desirous of limiting them, or more anxious to elevate the social position and intellectual character of the clergy, than the author of the *Tale of a Tub*. No veteran commander of a regiment could have had more of the military than the parson of Laracor had of the ecclesiastical *esprit de corps*; and, indeed, Swift's known dislike to the military may be best explained as the natural jealousy of

the surplice at the larger consideration accorded by society to the scarlet coat. Almost all Swift's writings between 1702 and 1710 are assertions of his High-Church sentiments, and vindications of the establishment against its assailants. Thus in 1708 came forth his *Letter on the Sacramental Test*, a hot High-Church and anti-Dissenter pamphlet; and this was followed in the same year by his *Sentiments of a Church of England man with respect to Religion and Government*, and by his ironical argument, aimed at free-thinkers and latitudinarians, entitled *Reasons against Abolishing Christianity*. In 1709 he published a graver pamphlet, under the name of a *Project for the Advancement of Religion*, in which he urged certain measures for the reform of public morals and the strengthening of the Establishment, recommending in particular a scheme of Church-extension. Thus, with all his readiness to help the Whigs politically, Swift was certainly faithful to his High-Church principles. But, as we have said, a High-Church Whig was an anomaly which the Whigs refused to comprehend. Latitudinarians, low Churchmen, and Dissenters, did not know what to make of a Whiggism in state-politics which was conjoined with the strongest form of ecclesiastical Toryism. Hence, in spite of all his ability, Swift was not a man that the Whigs could patronise and prefer. They were willing to have the benefit of his assistance, but their favours were reserved for men more wholly their own. Various things were, indeed, talked of for Swift—the secretaryship to the proposed embassy of Lord Berkeley in Vienna, a prebend of Westminster, the office of historiographer-royal; nay, even a bishopric in the American colonies; but all came to nothing. Swift, at the age of forty-three, and certified by Addison as “the greatest genius of the age,” was still only an Irish parson, with some 350*l.* or 400*l.* a year. How strange if the plan of the Transatlantic bishopric had been carried out, and Swift had settled in Virginia!

Meanwhile, though neglected by the English Whigs, Swift had risen to be a leader among the Irish clergy; a great man in their convocations and other ecclesiastical assemblies. The



object which the Irish clergy then had at heart was to procure from the Government an extension to Ireland of a boon granted several years before to the clergy of England, namely, the remission of the tax levied by the Crown on the revenues of the Church since the days of Henry VIII., in the shape of tenths and first-fruits. This remission, which would have amounted to about 16,000*l.* a year, the Whigs were not disposed to grant, the corresponding remission in the case of England not having been followed by the expected benefits. Archbishop King and the other prelates were glad to have Swift as their agent in this business ; and accordingly, he was absent from Ireland for upwards of twelve months continuously in the years 1708 and 1709. It was during this period that he set London in roars of laughter by his famous Bickerstaff hoax, in which he first predicted the death of Partridge, the astrologer, at a particular day and hour, and then nearly drove the wretched tradesman mad by declaring, when the time was come, that the prophecy had been fulfilled, and publishing a detailed account of the circumstances. Out of this Bickerstaff hoax, and Swift's talk over it with Addison and Steele, arose the *Tatler*, prolific parent of so many other periodicals.

The year 1710 was an important one in the life of Swift. In that year he came over to London, resolved in his own mind to have a settlement of accounts with the Whigs, or to break with them for ever. The Irish ecclesiastical business of the tenths and first-fruits was still his pretext, but he had many other arrears to introduce into the account. Accordingly, after some civil skirmishing with Somers, Halifax, and his other old friends, then just turned out of office, he openly transferred his allegiance to the new Tory administration of Harley and Bolingbroke. The 4th of October, not quite a month after his arrival in London, was the date of his first interview with Harley ; and, from that day forward till the dissolution of Harley's administration by the death of Queen Anne, in 1714, Swift's relations with Harley, St. John, and the other ministers, were more those of an intimate friend and adviser than of a literary dependent. How he dined

almost daily with Harley or St. John; how he bullied them, and made them beg his pardon when by chance they offended him—either, as Harley once did, by offering him a fifty-pound note, or, as St. John once did, by appearing cold and abstracted when Swift was his guest at dinner; how he obtained from them not only the settlement of the Irish business, but almost everything else he asked; how he used his influence to prevent Steele, Addison, Congreve, Rowe, and his other Whig literary friends, from suffering loss of office by the change in the state of politics, at the same time growing cooler in his private intercourse with Addison and poor Dick, and tending more to young Tory writers, such as Pope and Parnell; how, with Pope, Gay, Arbuthnot, Harley, and St. John, he formed the famous club of the *Scriblerus* brotherhood, for the satire of literary absurdities; how he wrote squibs, pamphlets, and lampoons innumerable for the Tories and against the Whigs, and at one time actually edited a Tory paper called the *Examiner*: all this is to be gathered, in most interesting detail, from his epistolary journal to Stella, in which he punctually kept her informed of all his doings during his long three years' absence. The following is a description of him at the height of his Court influence during this season of triumph, from the Whiggish, and therefore somewhat adverse pen of Bishop Kennet:—

“When I came to the antechamber (at Court) to wait before prayers, Dr. Swift was the principal man of talk and business, and acted as master of requests. He was soliciting the Earl of Arran to speak to his brother, the Duke of Ormond, to get a chaplain's place established in the garrison of Hull for Mr. Fiddes, a clergyman in that neighbourhood, who had lately been in jail, and published sermons to pay the fees. He was promising Mr. Thorold to undertake with my lord-treasurer that, according to his petition, he should obtain a salary of 200*l.* per annum as minister of the English church at Rotterdam. He stopped F. Gwynne, Esq., going in with the red bag to the Queen, and told him aloud he had something to say to him from my lord-treasurer. He talked with the son of Dr. Davenant, to be sent abroad, and took out his pocket-book, and wrote down several things as *memoranda* to do for him. He turned to the fire, and took out his gold watch, and telling him the time of day, complained it was very late. A gentleman said he was too fast. ‘How can I help it,’ says the Doctor, ‘if the courtiers give me a watch that won't go right?’ Then he instructed a young nobleman that the best poet in England was Mr. Pope (a Papist), who had begun a translation of Homer into English verse, for which he must have them all subscribe; ‘for,’ says he, ‘the author shall not begin to print till I have a thousand guineas for him.’ Lord-treasurer, after leaving the Queen, came through the room, beckoning Dr. Swift to follow him: both went off just before prayers.”

Let us see, by a few pickings from the journal to Stella, in what manner the black-browed Irish vicar, who was thus figuring in the mornings at Court as the friend and confidant of Ministers, and almost as their domineering colleague, was writing home from his lodging in the evenings to the "dear girls" at Laracor.

Dec. 3, 1710. "Pshaw, I must be writing to those dear saucy brats every night whether I will or no; let me have what business I will, or come home ever so late, or be ever so sleepy: but it is an old saying and a true one, 'Be you lords or be you earls, you must write to naughty girls.' I was to-day at Court, and saw Raymond [an Irish friend] among the beefeaters, staying to see the Queen: so I put him in a better station, made two or three dozen bows, and went to church, and then to Court again to pick up a dinner, as I did with Sir John Stanley: and then we went to visit Lord Mountjoy, and just left him; and 'tis near eleven at night, young women, and methinks this letter comes very near to the bottom, &c. &c."

Jan. 1, 1711. Morning. "I wish my dearest pretty Dingley and Stella a happy new year, and health, and mirth, and good stomachs, and *Pr*'s company. Faith, I did not know how to write *Pr*. I wondered what was the matter; but now I remember I always write *Pdfr* [by this combination of letters, or by the word *Presto*, Swift designates himself in the Journal] \* \* Get the *Examiners*, and read them; the last nine or ten are full of reasons for the late change and of the abuses of the last ministry; and the great men assure me they are all true. They were written by their encouragement and direction. I must rise, and go see Sir Andrew Fountain; but perhaps to-morrow I may answer *M. D.*'s [Stella's designation in the Journal] letter: so good morrow, my mistresses all, good morrow. I wish you both a merry new year; roast beef, minced pies, and good strong beer; and me a share of your good cheer; that I was there or you were here; and you're a little saucy dear, &c. &c."

Jan. 13, 1711. "O faith, I had an ugly giddy fit last night in my chamber, and I have got a new box of pills to take, and I hope shall have no more this good while. I would not tell you before, because it would vex you, little rogues; but now it is better. I dined to-day with Lord Shelburn, &c., &c."

Jan. 16, 1711. "My service to Mrs. Stode and Walls. Has she a boy or a girl? A girl, hmm!, and died in a week, hmmm!, and was poor Stella forced to stand for godmother?—Let me know how accounts stand, that you may have your money betimes. There's four months for my lodging; that must be thought on too. And zoo go dine with Manley, and lose your money, doo extravagant sluttikin? But don't fret. It will just be three weeks when I have the next letter, that is, to-morrow. Farewell, dearest beloved *M. D.*, and love poor, poor Presto, who has not had one happy day, since he left you, as hope to be saved."

March 7, 1711. "I am weary of business and ministers. I don't go to a coffee-house twice a month. I am very regular in going to sleep before eleven. And so you say that Stella's a pretty girl; and so she be; and methinks I see her just now, as handsome as the day's long. Do you know what? When I am writing in our language [a kind of baby-language of endearment used between him and Stella, and called 'the little language'] I make up my mouth just as if I was speaking it. I caught myself at it just now. \* \* Poor Stella, won't Dingley leave her a little daylight to write to Presto? Well, well, we'll have daylight shortly, spite of her teeth; and zoo must cly Zele, and Hele, and Hele aden. Must loo mimitate *Pdfr*, pay? Iss, and so la shall. And so leles fol ee rettle. Dood Mollow. (You must cry 'There and Here and Here again. Must you imitate *Pdfr*, pray? Yes, and so you shall. And so there 's for the letter. Good morrow.)"

And so on, through a series of daily letters, forming now a goodly octavo volume or more, Swift chats and rattles away to the "dear absent girls," giving them all the political gossip of the time, and informing them about his own goings-out and comings-in ; his dinings with Harley, St. John, and occasionally with Addison and other old Whig friends ; the state of his health, his troubles with his drunken servant Patrick, his lodging-expenses, and a host of other things. Such another journal has, perhaps, never been given to the world ; and, but for it, we should never have known what depths of tenderness, and power of affectionate prattle, there were in the heart of this harsh and savage man. Only on one topic, affecting himself during his long stay in London, is he in any degree reserved. Among the acquaintanceships he had formed was one with a Mrs. Vanhomrigh, a widowed lady of property, who had a family of several daughters. The eldest of these, Hester Vanhomrigh, was a girl of more than ordinary talent and accomplishments, and of enthusiastic and impetuous character ; and as Swift acquired the habit of dropping in upon the "Vans," as he called them, when he had no other dinner engagement, it was not long before he and Miss Vanhomrigh fell into the relationship of teacher and pupil. He taught her to think, and to write verses ; and as, among Swift's other peculiarities of opinion, one was that he entertained what would even now be called very advanced notions as to the intellectual capabilities and rights of women, he found no more pleasant amusement, in the midst of his politics and other business, than that of superintending the growth of so hopeful a mind.

"His conduct might have made him styled  
A father, and the nymph his child :  
The innocent delight he took  
To see the virgin mind her book  
Was but the master's secret joy  
In school to hear the finest boy."

But, alas ! Cupid got among the books.

"Vanessa, not in years a score,  
Dreams of a gown of forty-four ;  
Imaginary charms can find  
In eyes with reading almost blind ;  
She fancies music in his tongue,  
Nor farther looks, but thinks him young."

Nay, more ; one of Swift's lessons to her had been that frankness, whether in man or woman, was one of the chief of the virtues, and

“ That common forms were not design'd  
Directors to a noble mind.”

“ Then,” said the nymph,

“ I'll let you see  
My actions with your rules agree ;  
That I can vulgar forms despise,  
And have no secrets to disguise.”

She told her love, and fairly argued it out with the startled tutor, discussing every element in the question, whether for or against ; the disparity of their ages, her own five thousand guineas, their similarity of tastes, his views of ambition, the judgment the world would form of the match, and so on ; and the end of it was that she reasoned so well, that Swift could not but admit that there would be nothing after all so very incongruous in a marriage between him and Esther Vanhomrigh. So the matter rested, Swift gently resisting the impetuosity of the young woman, when it threatened to take him by storm, but not having the courage to adduce the real and conclusive argument—the existence on the other side of the channel of another and a dearer Esther. Stella, on her side, knew that Swift visited a family called the “ Vans ; ” she divined that something was wrong ; but that was all.

That Swift, the Mentor of ministers, their daily companion, their factotum, at whose bidding they dispensed their patronage and their favour, should himself be suffered to remain a mere vicar of an Irish parish, was, of course, impossible. Vehement and even boisterous and overdone as was his zeal for his own independence—“ If we let these great ministers pretend too much, there will be no governing them,” was his maxim ; and, in order to act up to it, he used to treat Dukes and Earls as if they were dogs—there were yet means of honourably acknowledging his services in a way to which he would have taken no exception. Nor can we doubt that Oxford and St. John, who were really

and heartily his admirers, were anxious to promote him in some suitable manner. An English bishopric was certainly what he coveted, and what they would at once have given him. But though the bishopric of Hereford fell vacant in 1712, there was, as Sir Walter Scott says, "a lion in the path." Queen Anne, honest dowdy woman,—her instinctive dislike of Swift strengthened by the private influence of the Archbishop of York, and the Duchess of Somerset, whose red hair Swift had lampooned—obstinately refused to make the author of the *Tale of a Tub* a bishop. Even an English deanery could not be found for so questionable a Christian; and in 1713 Swift was obliged to accept, as the best thing he could get, the deanery of St. Patrick's, in his native city of Dublin. He hurried over to Ireland to be installed, and came back just in time to partake in the last struggles and dissensions of the Tory administration, before Queen Anne's death. By his personal exertions with ministers, and his pamphlet entitled *Public Spirit of the Whigs*, he tried to buoy up the sinking Tory cause. But the Queen's death destroyed all; with George I. the Whigs came in again; the late Tory ministers were dispersed and disgraced, and Swift shared their fall. "Dean Swift," says Arbuthnot, "keeps up his noble spirit; and, though like a man knocked down, you may behold him still with a stern countenance, and aiming a blow at his adversaries." He returned, with rage and grief in his heart, to Ireland, a disgraced man, and in danger of arrest on account of his connexion with the late ministers. Even in Dublin he was insulted as he walked in the streets.

For twelve years, that is, from 1714 to 1726, Swift did not quit Ireland. At his first coming, as he tells us in one of his letters, he was "horribly melancholy;" but the melancholy began to wear off; and having made up his mind to his exile in the country of his detestation, he fell gradually into the routine of his duties as Dean. How he boarded in a private family in the town, stipulating for leave to invite his friends to dinner at so much a head, and only having two evenings a week at the deanery for larger recep-



tions ; how he brought Stella and Mrs. Dingley from Laracor, and settled them in lodgings on the other side of the Liffy, keeping up the same precautions in his intercourse with them as before, but devolving the management of his receptions at the deanery upon Stella, who did all the honours of the house ; how he had his own way in all cathedral business, and had always a few clergymen and others in his train, who toadied him, and took part in the facetious horse-play of which he was fond ; how gradually his physiognomy became known to the citizens, and his eccentricities familiar to them, till the "Dean" became the lion of Dublin, and everybody turned to look at him as he walked in the streets ; how, among the Dean's other oddities, he was popularly charged with stinginess in his entertainments, and a sharp look-out after the wine ; how sometimes he would fly off from town, and take refuge in some country-seat of a friendly Irish nobleman ; how all this while he was reading books of all kinds, writing notes and jottings, and corresponding with Pope, Gay, Prior, Arbuthnot, Oxford, Bolingbroke, and other literary and political friends in London or abroad—are matters in the recollection of all who have read any of the biographies of Swift. It is also known that it was during this period that the Stella-and-Vanessa imbroglio reached its highest degree of entanglement. Scarcely had the Dean located Stella and Mrs. Dingley in their lodging in Dublin, when, as he had feared, the impetuous Vanessa crossed the channel to be near him too. Her mother's death, and the fact that she and her younger sister had a small property in Ireland, were pretext enough. A scrap or two from surviving letters will tell the sequel, and will suggest the state of the relations at this time between Swift and this unhappy, and certainly very extraordinary woman :—

*Swift to Miss Vanhomrigh : London, Aug. 12, 1714.* "I had your letter last post, and before you can send me another I shall set out for Ireland \* \* \* If you are in Ireland when I am there, I shall see you very seldom. It is not a place for any freedom, but where everything is known in a week, and magnified a hundred degrees. These are rigorous laws that must be passed through; but it is probable we may meet in London in winter ; or, if not, leave all to fate." \* \* \*

*Miss Vanhomrigh to Swift. Dublin, 1714 (some time after August)* "You once had a maxim, which was to act what was right, and not mind what the

world would say. I wish you would keep to it now. Pray, what can be wrong in seeing and advising an unhappy young woman? I cannot imagine. You cannot but know that your frowns make my life unsupportable. You have taught me to distinguish, and then you leave me miserable." \* \* \*

*Miss Vanhomrigh to Swift: Dublin, 1714.* "You bid me be easy, and you would see me as often as you could. You had better have said as often as you could get the better of your inclinations so much, or as often as you remembered there was such a one in the world. If you continue to treat me as you do, you will not be made uneasy by me long. It is impossible to describe what I have suffered since I saw you last. I am sure I could have bore the rack much better than those killing, killing words of yours. Sometimes I have resolved to die without seeing you more; but those resolves, to your misfortune, did not last long; for there is something in human nature that prompts one to find relief in this world. I must give way to it, and beg you'd see me, and speak kindly to me; for I am sure you'd not condemn any one to suffer what I have done, could you but know it. The reason I write to you is, because I cannot tell it to you should I see you. For when I begin to complain, then you are angry; and there is something in your looks so awful, that it strikes me dumb." \* \* \*

Here a gap intervenes, which record fills up with but an indication here and there. Swift saw Vanessa, sometimes with that "something awful in his looks which struck her dumb," sometimes with words of perplexed kindness; he persuaded her to go out, to read, to amuse herself; he introduced clergymen to her — one of them afterwards Archbishop of Cashel—as suitors for her hand; he induced her to leave Dublin, and go to her property at Selbridge, about twelve miles from Dublin, where now and then he went to visit her, where she used to plant laurels against every time of his coming, and where "Vanessa's bower," in which she and the Dean used to sit, with books and writing materials before them, during those happy visits, was long an object of interest to tourists; he wrote kindly letters to her, some in French, praising her talents, her conversation, and her writing, and saying that he found in her "*tout ce que la nature a donnée à un mortel*"—"l'honneur, la vertu, le bon sens, l'esprit, la douceur, l'agrément et la fermeté d'âme." All did not suffice; and one has to fancy, during these long years, the restless beatings, on the one hand, of that impassioned woman's heart, now lying as cold, undistinguishable ashes in some Irish grave; and, on the other hand, the distraction, and anger, and daily terror of the man she clung to. For, somehow or other, there *was* an element of terror mingled with the affair. What it was, is beyond easy scrutiny; though possibly the data

exist, if they were well sifted. The ordinary story is that some time in the midst of these entanglements with Vanessa, and in consequence of their effects on the rival-relationship—Stella having been brought almost to death's door by the anxieties caused her by Vanessa's proximity, and by her own equivocal position in society—the form of marriage was gone through by Swift and Stella, and they became legally husband and wife, although with an engagement that the matter should remain secret, and that there should be no change in their manner of living. The year 1716, when Swift was forty-nine years of age, and Stella thirty-two, is assigned as the date of this event; and the ceremony is said to have been performed in the garden of the deanery by the Bishop of Clogher. But more mystery remains. "Immediately subsequent to the ceremony," says Sir Walter Scott, "Swift's state of mind appears to have been dreadful. Delany (as I have learned from a friend of his widow) said that about the time it was supposed to have taken place he observed Swift to be extremely gloomy and agitated; so much so, that he went to Archbishop King to mention his apprehensions. On entering the library Swift rushed out with a countenance of distraction, and passed him without speaking. He found the archbishop in tears; and, upon asking the reason, he said, 'You have just met the most unhappy man on earth; but on the subject of his wretchedness you must never ask a question.'" What are we to make of this? Nay more, what are we to make of it, when we find that the alleged marriage of Swift with Stella, with which Scott connects the story, is after all denied by some as resting on no sufficient evidence; even Dr. Delany, though he believed in the marriage, and supposed it to have taken place about the time of this remarkable interview with the archbishop, having no certain information on the subject? If we assume a secret marriage with Stella, indeed, the subsequent portion of the Vanessa story becomes more explicable. On this assumption we are to imagine Swift continuing his letters to Vanessa, and his occasional visits to her at Selbridge on the old footing for some years after the marriage, with the undivulged secret ever in his mind, increasing tenfold his

former awkwardness in encountering her presence. And so we come to the year 1720, when, as the following scraps will show, a new paroxysm on the part of Vanessa brought on a new crisis in their relations.

*Miss Vanhomrigh to Swift: Selbridge, 1720.* "Believe me, it is with the utmost regret that I now write to you, because I know your good-nature such that you cannot see any human creature miserable without being sensibly touched. Yet what can I do? I must either unload my heart, and tell you all its griefs, or sink under the inexpressible distress I now suffer by your prodigious neglect of me. It is now ten long weeks since I saw you, and in all that time I have never received but one letter from you, and a little note with an excuse. Oh, have you forgot me? You endeavour by severities to force me from you. Nor can I blame you; for with the utmost distress and confusion I behold myself the cause of uneasy reflections to you. Yet I cannot comfort you, but here declare that it is not in the power of art, time, or accident, to lessen the inexpressible passion I have for ——. Put my passion under the utmost restraint, send me as distant from you as the earth will allow; yet you cannot banish those charming ideas which will ever stick by me whilst I have the use of memory. Nor is the love I bear you only seated in my soul; for there is not a single atom of my frame that is not blended with it. Therefore do not flatter yourself that separation will ever change my sentiments; for I find myself unquiet in the midst of silence, and my heart is at once pierced with sorrow and love. For Heaven's sake, tell me what has caused this prodigious change in you which I have found of late." \* \* \*

*Miss Vanhomrigh to Swift: Dublin, 1720.* \* \* "I believe you thought I only rallied when I told you the other night that I would pester you with letters. Once more I advise you, if you have any regard for your quiet, to alter your behaviour quickly; for I do assure you I have too much spirit to sit down contented with this treatment. Because I love frankness extremely, I here tell you now that I have determined to try all manner of human arts to reclaim you; and if all these fail, I am resolved to have recourse to the black one, which, it is said, never does. Now see what inconveniency you will bring both yourself and me unto \* \*. When I undertake a thing, I don't love to do it by halves."

*Swift to Miss Vanhomrigh: Dublin, 1720.* "If you write as you do, I shall come the seldomer on purpose to be pleased with your letters, which I never look into without wondering how a brat that cannot read can possibly write so well. \* \* Raillery apart, I think it inconvenient, for a hundred reasons, that I should make your house a sort of constant dwelling-place. I will certainly come as often as I conveniently can; but my health and the perpetual run of ill weather hinder me from going out in the morning, and my afternoons are taken up I know not how; so that I am in rebellion with a hundred people besides yourself for not seeing them. For the rest, you need make use of no other black art besides your ink. It is a pity your eyes are not black, or I would have said the same; but you are a white witch, and can do no mischief." \* \* \*

*Swift to Miss Vanhomrigh: Dublin, 1720.* "I received your letter when some company was with me on Saturday night, and it put me in such confusion that I could not tell what to do. This morning a woman who does business for me, told me she heard I was in love with one, naming you, and twenty particulars; that little master — and I visited you, and that the Archbishop did so; and that you had abundance of wit, &c. I ever feared the tattle of this nasty town, and told you so; and that was the reason why I said to you long ago that I would see you seldom when you were in Ireland; and I must beg you to be easy, if, for some time, I visit you seldomer, and not in so particular a manner." \* \* \*



*Miss Vanhomrigh to Swift: Selbridge, 1720.* \* \* "Solitude is unsupportable to a mind which is not easy. I have worn out my days in sighing and my nights in watching and thinking of —, who thinks not of me. How many letters shall I send you before I receive an answer? \* \* Oh that I could hope to see you here, or that I could go to you! I was born with violent passions, which terminate all in one—that inexpressible passion I have for you. \* \* Surely you cannot possibly be so taken up, but you might command a moment to write to me, and force your inclinations to so great a charity. I firmly believe, if I could know your thoughts (which no human creature is capable of guessing at, because never any one living thought like you), I should find you had often in a rage wished me religious, hoping then I should have paid my devotions to Heaven. But that would not spare you; for were I an enthusiast, still you'd be the deity I should worship. What marks are there of a deity, but what you are to be known by? You are present everywhere; your dear image is always before my eyes. Sometimes you strike me with that prodigious awe, I tremble with fear; at other times a charming compassion shines through your countenance, which revives my soul. Is it not more reasonable to adore a radiant form one has seen than one only described?"

*Swift to Miss Vanhomrigh: Dublin, October 15, 1720.* "All the morning I am plagued with impertinent visits, below any man of sense or honour to endure, if it were any way avoidable. Afternoons and evenings are spent abroad in walking to keep off and avoid spleen as far as I can; so that when I am not so good a correspondent as I could wish, you are not to quarrel and be governor, but to impute it to my situation, and to conclude infallibly that I have the same respect and kindness for you I ever professed to have." \* \*

*Swift to Miss Vanhomrigh: Gallstown, July 5, 1721.* \* \* "Settle your affairs, and quit this scoundrel-island, and things will be as you desire. I can say no more, being called away. *Mais soyez assurée que jamais personne au monde n'a été aimée, honorée, estimée, adorée par votre ami que vous.*"

Vanessa did not quit the "scoundrel-island;" but, on the contrary, remained in it, unmanageable as ever. In 1722, about a year after the date of the last scrap, the catastrophe came. In a wild fit Vanessa, as the story is, took the bold step of writing to Stella, insisting on an explanation of the nature of Swift's engagements to her; Stella placed the letter in Swift's hands; and Swift, in a paroxysm of fury, rode instantly to Selbridge, saw Vanessa without speaking, laid a letter on her table, and rode off again. The letter was Vanessa's death-warrant. Within a few weeks she was dead, having previously revoked a will in which she had bequeathed all her fortune to Swift.

Whatever may have been the purport of Vanessa's communication to Stella, it produced no change in Swift's relations to the latter. The pale pensive face of Hester Johnson, with her "fine dark eyes" and hair "black as a raven," was still to be seen on reception-evenings at the deanery, where also she and Mrs. Dingley would sometimes take up their abode,

when Swift was suffering from one of his attacks of vertigo, and required to be nursed. Nay, during those very years in which, as we have just seen, Swift was attending to the movements to and fro of the more imperious Vanessa in the background, and assuaging her passion by visits and letters, and praises of her powers, and professions of his admiration of her beyond all her sex, he was all the while keeping up the same affectionate style of intercourse as ever with the more gentle Stella, whose happier lot it was to be stationed in the centre of his domestic circle, and addressing to her, in a less forced manner, praises singularly like those he addressed to her rival. Thus, every year, on Stella's birth-day, he wrote a little poem in honour of the occasion. Take the one for 1718, beginning thus:—

“Stella this day is thirty-four,  
 (We sha’n’t dispute a year or more:)  
 However, Stella, be not troubled;  
 Although thy size and years be doubled,  
 Since first I saw thee at sixteen,  
 The brightest virgin on the green,  
 So little is thy form declined;  
 Made up so largely in thy mind.”

Stella would reciprocate these compliments by verses on the Dean's birth-day; and one is struck with the similarity of her acknowledgments of what the Dean had taught her and done for her, to those of Vanessa. Thus, in 1721,—

“When men began to call me fair,  
 You interposed your timely care;  
 You early taught me to despise  
 The ogling of a coxcomb's eyes;  
 Show'd where my judgment was misplaced,  
 Refined my fancy and my taste.  
 You taught how I might youth prolong  
 By knowing what was right and wrong;  
 How from my heart to bring supplies  
 Of lustre to my fading eyes;  
 How soon a beauteous mind repairs  
 The loss of changed or falling hairs;  
 How wit and virtue from within  
 Send out a smoothness o'er the skin,  
 Your lectures could my fancy fix,  
 And I can please at thirty-six.”

The death of Vanessa, in 1722, left Swift from that time entirely Stella's. How she got over the Vanessa affair in her own mind, when the full extent of the facts became known to



her, can only be guessed. When some one alluded to the fact that Swift had written beautifully about Vanessa, she is reported to have said, "That doesn't signify, for we all know the Dean could write beautifully about a broomstick." "A woman, a true woman!" is Mr. Thackeray's characteristic comment.

To the world's end, those who take interest in Swift's life will range themselves either on the side of Stella or on that of Vanessa. Mr. Thackeray prefers Stella, but admits that in doing so, though the majority of men may be on his side, he will have most women against him. Which way Swift's *heart* inclined him, it is not difficult to see. Stella was the main influence of his life; the intimacy with Vanessa was but an episode. And yet when he speaks of the two women as a critic, there is a curious equality in his appreciation of them. Of Stella he used to say that her wit and judgment were such, that "she never failed to say the best thing that was said wherever she was in company;" and one of his epistolary compliments to Vanessa is that he had "always remarked that, neither in general nor in particular conversation, had any word ever escaped her lips that could by possibility have been better." Some little differences in his preceptorial treatment of them may be discerned, as, for example, when he finds it necessary to admonish poor Stella for her incorrigible bad spelling—no such admonition, apparently, being required for Vanessa; or when, in praising Stella, he dwells chiefly on her honour and gentle kindliness, whereas in praising Vanessa he dwells chiefly on her genius and force of mind. But it is distinctly on record that his regard for both was founded on his belief that in respect of intellectual habits and culture both were above the contemporary standard of their sex. And here let us repeat that, not only from the evidence afforded by the whole story of Swift's relations to these two women, but also from the evidence of distinct doctrinal passages scattered through his works, it is plain that those who in the present day, both in this country and in America, maintain the intellectual equality of the two sexes, and the right of women to as full and varied an education, and as free a social use of

their powers, as is allowed to men, may claim Swift a pioneer in their cause. Both Stella and Vanessa have left their testimony that from the very first Swift took care to indoctrinate them with peculiar views on this subject; and both thank him for having done so. Stella even goes further, and almost urges Swift to do on the great scale what he had done for her individually:—

“O, turn your precepts into laws,  
Redeem the woman's ruin'd cause;  
Retrieve lost empire to our sex,  
That men may bow their rebel necks.”

This fact that Swift had a *theory* on the subject of the proper mode of treating and educating women, which theory was in antagonism to the ideas of his time, explains much both in his conduct as a man and in his habits as a writer.

For the first six years of his exile in Ireland after the death of Queen Anne, Swift had published nothing of any consequence, and had kept aloof from politics, except when they were brought to his door by local quarrels. In 1720, however, he again flashed forth as a political luminary, in a character that could hardly have been anticipated—that of an Irish patriot. Taking up the cause of the “scoundrel-island,” to which he belonged by birth, if not by affection, and to which fate had consigned him, in spite of all his efforts, he made that cause his own; virtually said to his old Whig enemies then in power on the other side of the water, “Yes, I am an Irishman, and I will show you what an Irishman is;” and, constituting himself the representative of the island, hurled it, with all its pent-up mass of rage and wrongs, against Walpole and his administration. First, in revenge for the commercial wrongs of Ireland, came his *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufactures, utterly Rejecting and Renouncing Everything Wearable that comes from England*; then, amidst the uproar and danger excited by this proposal, other and other defiances in the same tone; and lastly, in 1723, on the occasion of the royal patent to poor William Wood to supply Ireland, without her own consent, with a hundred and eight thousand pounds' worth of copper half-

of English manuscripts, the unparalleled *Drapier's Letters*, which boasted the character of the coppers and asserted the nationality of Ireland. All Ireland, Catholic as well as Protestant, blessed the name of St. Patrick's; associations were formed for the honour of his person: and had Walpole and his Whigs succeeded in bringing him to trial, it would have been at the expense of an Irish rebellion. From that time till his death Swift was the true King of Ireland; only when O'Connell arose in the heart of the nation yield equal veneration to any single chief: and even at this day the grateful Irish, forgetting his gifts against them, and forgetting his continual habit of distinguishing between the Irish population as a whole and the English and Protestant part of it to which he belonged himself, cherish his memory with loving enthusiasm and speak of him as the "great Irishman." Among the phases of Swift's life, this of his having been an Irish patriot and agitator deserves to be particularly remembered.

In the year 1726, Swift, then in his sixtieth year, and in the full flush of his new popularity as the champion of Irish nationality, visited England for the first time since Queen Anne's death. Once there, he was loth to return; and a considerable portion of the years 1726 and 1727 was spent by him in or near London. This was the time of the publication of *Gulliver's Travels*, which had been written some years before, and also of some *Miscellanies*, which were edited for him by Pope. It was at Pope's villa at Twickenham that most of his time was spent; and it was there and at this time that the long friendship between Swift and Pope ripened into that extreme and affectionate intimacy which they both loved to acknowledge. Gay, Arbuthnot, and Bolingbroke, now returned from exile, joined Pope in welcoming their friend. Addison had been dead several years. Prior was dead, and also Vanbrugh and Parnell. Steele was yet alive; but between him and Swift there was no longer any tie. Political and aristocratic acquaintances, old and new, there were in abundance, all anxious once again to have Swift among them to fight their battles. Old George I. had not long to live,

and the Tories were trying again to come into power in the train of the Prince of Wales. There were even chances of an arrangement with Walpole, with possibilities, in that or in some other way, that Swift should not die a mere Irish dean. These prospects were but temporary. The old King died; and contrary to expectation, George II. retained Walpole and his Whig colleagues. In October, 1727, Swift left England for the last time. He returned to Dublin just in time to watch over the death-bed of Stella, who expired, after a lingering illness, in January, 1728. Swift was then in his sixty-second year.

The story of the remaining seventeen years of Swift's life—for, with all his maladies, bodily and mental, his strong frame withstood, for all that time of solitude and gloom, the wear of mortality—is perhaps better known than any other part of his biography. How his irritability and eccentricities and avarice grew upon him, so that his friends and servants had a hard task in humouring him, we learn from the traditions of others; how his memory began to fail, and other signs of breaking up began to appear, we learn from himself:—

“See how the Dean begins to break !  
 Poor gentleman, he droops apace ;  
 You plainly find it in his face.  
 That old vertigo in his head  
 Will never leave him till he's dead.  
 Besides, his memory decays ;  
 He recollects not what he says ;  
 He cannot call his friends to mind,  
 Forgets the place where last he dined ;  
 Plies you with stories o'er and o'er ;  
 He told them fifty times before.”

The fire of his genius, however, was not yet burnt out. Between 1729 and 1736 he continued to throw out satires and lampoons in profusion, referring to the men and topics of the day, and particularly to the political affairs of Ireland; and it was during this time that his *Directions to Servants*, his *Polite Conversation*, and other well-known facetiæ, first saw the light. From the year 1736, however, it was well known in Dublin that the Dean was no more what he had been, and that his recovery was not to be looked for. The rest will be best told in the words of Sir Walter Scott:—

"The last scene was now rapidly approaching, and the stage darkened ere the curtain fell. From 1736 onward the Dean's fits of periodical giddiness and deafness had returned with violence; he could neither enjoy conversation nor amuse himself with writing, and an obstinate resolution which he had formed not to wear glasses, prevented him from reading. The following dismal letter to Mrs. Whiteway [his cousin, and chief attendant in his last days] in 1740, is almost the last document which we possess of the celebrated Swift as a rational and reflecting being. It awfully foretells the catastrophe which shortly after took place.

'I have been very miserable all night, and to-day extremely deaf and full of pain. I am so stupid and confounded, that I cannot express the mortification I am under both in body and mind. All I can say is that I am not in torture; but I daily and hourly expect it. Pray let me know how your health is and your family. I hardly understand one word I write. I am sure my days will be very few; few and miserable they must be.

'I am, for these few days,

'Yours entirely,

'J. SWIFT.'

'If I do not blunder, it is Saturday, July 26, 1740.'

"His understanding having totally failed soon after these melancholy expressions of grief and affection, his first state was that of violent and furious lunacy. His estate was put under the management of trustees, and his person confided to the care of Dr. Lyons, a respectable clergyman, curate to the Rev. Robert King, prebendary of Dunlavin, one of Swift's executors. This gentleman discharged his melancholy task with great fidelity, being much and gratefully attached to the object of his care. From a state of outrageous frenzy, aggravated by severe bodily suffering, the illustrious Dean of St. Patrick's sank into the situation of a helpless changeling. In the course of about three years he is only known to have spoken once or twice. At length, when this awful moral lesson had subsisted from 1743 until the 19th of October, 1745, it pleased God to release him from this calamitous situation. He died upon that day without a single pang, so gently that his attendants were scarce aware of the moment of his dissolution."

Swift was seventy-eight years of age at the time of his death, having outlived all his contemporaries of the Queen Anne cluster of wits, with the exception of Bolingbroke, Ambrose Philips, and Cibber. Congreve had died in 1729; Steele in the same year; Defoe, in 1731; Gay, in 1732; Arbuthnot, in 1735; Tickell, in 1740; and Pope, who was Swift's junior by twenty-one years, in 1744. Swift, therefore, is entitled in our literary histories to the place of patriarch as well as to that of chief among the wits of Queen Anne's reign; and he stands nearest to our own day of any of them whose writings we still read. As late as the year 1820 a person was alive who had seen Swift as he lay dead in the deanery before his burial, great crowds going to take their last look of him. "The coffin was open; he had on his head neither cap nor wig; there was not much hair on the front or very top, but it was long and thick behind, very white, and

was like flax upon the pillow." Such is the last glimpse we have of Swift on earth. Exactly ninety years afterwards the coffin was taken up from its resting-place in the aisle of the cathedral; and the skull of Swift, the white locks now all mouldered away from it, became an object of scientific curiosity. Phrenologically, it was a disappointment, the extreme lowness of the forehead striking every one, and the so-called organs of wit, causality, and comparison being scarcely developed at all. There were peculiarities, however, in the shape of the interior indicating larger capacity of brain than would have been inferred from the external aspect. Stella's coffin was exhumed, and her skull examined at the same time. The examiners found the skull "a perfect model of symmetry and beauty."

Have we said too much in declaring that of all the men who illustrated that period of our literary history which lies between the Revolution of 1688 and the beginning or middle of the reign of George II., Swift alone (excepting Pope, and excepting him only on certain definite and peculiar grounds) fulfils to any tolerable extent those conditions which would entitle him to the epithet of "great," already refused by us to his age as a whole? We do not think so. Swift *was* a great genius; nay, if by *greatness* we understand general mass and energy rather than any preconceived peculiarity of quality, he was the greatest genius of his age. Neither Addison, nor Steele, nor Pope, nor Defoe, possessed, in anything like the same degree, that which Goethe and Niebuhr, seeking a name for a certain attribute found always present, as they thought, in the higher and more forcible order of historic characters, agreed to call the *demoniac* element. Indeed very few men in our literature, from first to last, have had so much of this element in them—the sign and source of all real greatness—as Swift. In him it was so obvious as to attract notice at once. "There is something in your looks," wrote Vanessa to him, "so awful that it strikes me dumb;" and again, "Sometimes you strike me with that prodigious awe, I tremble with fear;" and again, "What marks are there of a deity that you are not known by?" True, these



are the words of a woman infatuated with love; but there is evidence that wherever Swift went, and in whatever society he was, there was this magnetic power in his presence. Pope felt it; Addison felt it; they all felt it. We question if, among all our literary celebrities, from first to last, there has been one more distinguished for being personally formidable to all who came near him.

And yet in calling Swift a great genius we clearly do not mean to rank him in the same order of greatness with such men among his predecessors as Spenser, or Shakespeare, or Milton, or such men among his successors, as Scott, Coleridge and Wordsworth. We even retain instinctively the right of not according to him a certain kind of admiration which we bestow on such men of his own generation as Pope, Steele, and Addison. How is this? What is the drawback about Swift's genius which prevents us from referring him to that highest order of literary greatness to which we do refer others, who in respect of hard general capacity were apparently not superior to him, and on the borders of which we also place some who in that respect were certainly his inferiors? To make the question more special, why do we call Milton great in quite a different sense from that in which we consent to confer the same epithet on Swift?

Altogether, it will be said, Milton was a greater man than Swift; his intellect was higher, richer, deeper, grander; his views of things are more profound, grave, stately, and exalted. This is a true enough statement of the case; and we like that comprehensive use of the word intellect which it implies, wrapping up, as it were, all that is in and about a man in this one word, so as to dispense with the distinctions between imaginative and non-imaginative, spiritual and unspiritual natures, and make every possible question about a man a mere question in the end as to the size or degree of his intellect. But such a mode of speaking is too violent and recondite for common purposes. According to the common use of the word intellect, it might be maintained (we do not say it would) that Swift's intellect, meaning his strength of mental grasp, was equal to Milton's; and yet that, by reason of the

fact that his intellectual style was deficient, that he did not grasp things precisely in the Miltonic way, a distinction might be drawn unfavourable, on the whole, to his genius as compared with that of Milton. According to such a view, we must seek for that in Swift's genius, upon which it depends that while we accord to it all the admiration we bestow on strength, our sympathies with height or sublimity are left unmoved. Nor have we far to seek. When Goethe and Niebuhr generalized in the phrase, "the demoniac element," that mystic something which they seemed to detect in all men of unusual potency among their fellows, they used the word "demoniac," not in its English sense, as signifying what appertains specially to the demons or powers of darkness, but in its Greek sense, as equally implying the unseen agencies of light and good. The demoniac element in a man, therefore, may in one case be the demoniac of the etherial and celestial, in another the demoniac of the Tartarean and infernal. There is a demoniac of the supernatural—angels, and seraphs, and white-winged airy messengers swaying men's phantasies from above; and there is a demoniac of the infra-natural—fiends and shapes of horror tugging at men's thoughts from beneath. The demoniac in Swift was of the latter kind. It is false, it would be an entire mistake as to his genius, to say that he regarded, or was inspired by, only the worldly and the secular; that men, women, and their relations in the little world of visible life, were all that his intellect cared to recognise. He also, like our Miltons and our Shakespeares, and all our men who have been anything more than prudential and pleasant writers, had his being anchored in things and imaginations beyond the visible verge. But while it was given to them to hold rather by things and imaginations belonging to the region of the celestial, to hear angelic music and the rustling of seraphic wings; it was his unhappier lot to be related rather to the darker and subterranean mysteries. One might say of Swift that he had far less of belief in a God than of belief in a devil. He is like a man walking on the earth and among the busy haunts of his fellow-mortals, observing them and their ways, and taking his part in the bustle; all the while,

however, conscious of the tuggings downward of secret chains reaching into the world of the demons. Hence his ferocity, his misanthropy, his *sæva indignatio*, all of them true forms of energy, imparting unusual potency to a life; but forms of energy bred of communion with what outlies nature on the lower or infernal side.

Swift, doubtless, had this melancholic tendency in him constitutionally from the beginning. From the first we see him an unruly, rebellious, gloomy, revengeful, unforgiving spirit, loyal to no authority, and gnashing under every restraint. With nothing small or weak in his nature, too proud to be dishonest, bold and fearless in his opinions, capable of strong attachments and of hatred as strong, it was to be predicted that if the swarthy Irish youth, whom Sir William Temple received into his house, when his college had all but expelled him for contumacy, should ever be eminent in the world, it would be for fierce and controversial, and not for beautiful or harmonious, activity. It is clear, however, on a survey of Swift's career, that the gloom and melancholy which characterised it, was not altogether congenital, but in part, at least grew out of some special circumstance or set of circumstances, having a precise date and locality among the facts of his life. In other words, there was some secret in Swift's life, some root of bitterness or remorse, diffusing a black poison throughout his whole existence. That communion with the invisible almost exclusively on the infernal side—that consciousness of chains wound round his own moving frame at the one end, and at the other tugged at by demons in the depths of their populous pit, while no cords of love were felt sustaining him from the countervailing heaven—had its origin, in part at least, in some one recollection or cause of dread. It was some one demon down in that pit that tugged the chains; the others but assisted him. Thackeray's perception seems to us exact when he says of Swift that "he goes through life, tearing, like a man possessed with a devil;" or again, changing the form of the figure, that, "like Abudah, in the Arabian story, he is always looking out for the Fury, and knows that the night will come, and the inevitable hag with it." What was

this Fury, this hag that duly came in the night, making the mornings horrible by the terrors of recollection, the evenings horrible by those of anticipation, and leaving but a calm hour at full mid-day? There was a secret in Swift's life; what was it? His biographers as yet have failed to agree on this dark topic. Thackeray's hypothesis, that the cause of Swift's despair was chiefly his consciousness of disbelief in the creed to which he had sworn his professional faith, does not seem to us sufficient. In Swift's days, and even with his frank nature, we think that difficulty could have been got over. There was nothing, at least, so unique in the case as to justify the supposition that this was what Archbishop King referred to in that memorable saying to Dr. Delany, "You have just met the most miserable man on earth; but on the subject of his wretchedness you must never ask a question." Had Swift made a confession of scepticism to the Archbishop, we do not think the prelate would have been taken so very much by surprise. Nor can we think, with some, that Swift's vertigo (now pronounced to have been increasing congestion of the brain) and his life-long certainty that it would end in idiotcy or madness, are the true explanation of this interview and of the mystery which it shrouds. There was cause enough for melancholy here, but not exactly the cause that meets the case. Another hypothesis there is of a physical kind, which Scott and others hint at, and which finds great acceptance with the medical philosophers. Swift, it is said, was of "a cold temperament," &c. &c. But why a confession on the part of Swift that he was not a marrying man, even had he added that he desired, above all things in the world, to be a person of this sort, should have so moved the heart of an Archbishop, we cannot conceive. Besides, although this hypothesis might explain much of the Stella and Vanessa imbroglio, it would not explain all; nor do we see on what foundation it could rest. Scott's assertion that all through Swift's writings there is no evidence of his having felt the tender passion, is simply untrue. On the whole, the hypothesis which has been started of a too near consanguinity between Swift and Stella, either known from the first to one or both, or discovered too

late, would most nearly suit the conditions of the case. And yet, so far as we have seen, this hypothesis also rests on air, with no one fact to support it. Could we suppose that Swift, like another Eugene Aram, went through the world with a murder on his mind, it might be taken as a solution of the mystery; but as we cannot do this, we must be content with supposing that either some one of the foregoing hypotheses, or some combination of them, is to be accepted, or that the matter is altogether inscrutable.

Such by constitution as we have described him—with an intellect strong as iron, much acquired knowledge, an ambition all but insatiable, and a decided desire to be wealthy—Swift, almost as a matter of course, flung himself impetuously into the Whig and Tory controversy, which was the question paramount in his time. In that he laboured as only a man of his powers could, bringing to the side of the controversy on which he chanced to be—and we believe when he was on a side it was honestly because he found a certain preponderance of right in it—a hard and ruthless vigour which served it immensely. But from the first, and, at all events, after the disappointments of a political career had been experienced by him, his nature would not work alone in the narrow warfare of Whiggism and Toryism, but overflowed in general bitterness of reflection on all the customs and ways of humanity. The following passage in *Gulliver's Voyage to Brobdingnag*, describing how the politics of Europe appeared to the King of Brobdingnag, shows us Swift himself in his larger mood of thought.

“This prince took a pleasure in conversing with me, inquiring into the manners, religion, laws, government, and learning of Europe; wherein I gave him the best account I was able. His apprehension was so clear, and his judgment so exact, that he made very wise reflections and observations upon all I said. But I confess that after I had been a little too copious in talking of my own beloved country, of our trade, and wars by sea and land, of our schisms in religion, and parties in the state, the prejudices of his education prevailed so far that he could not forbear taking me up in his right hand, and stroking me gently with the other, after an hearty fit of laughing, asking me, whether I was a Whig or Tory. Then turning to his first minister, who waited behind him with a white staff nearly as tall as the mainmast of the ‘Royal Sovereign,’ he observed how contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such diminutive insects as I; ‘And yet,’ says he, ‘I dare engage these creatures have their titles and distinctions of honour; they contrive little nests and burrows, that they call houses and cities; they make a



figure in dress and equipage ; they love, they fight, they dispute, they cheat, they betray.' And thus he continued on, while my colour came and went several times with indignation to hear our noble country, the mistress of arts and arms, the scourge of France, the arbitress of Europe, the seat of virtue, piety, honour, truth, the pride and envy of the world, so contemptuously treated."

Swift's writings, accordingly, divide themselves, in the main, into two classes,—pamphlets, tracts, lampoons, and the like, bearing directly on persons and topics of the day, and written with the ordinary purpose of a partisan ; and satires of a more general aim, directed, in the spirit of a cynic philosopher, against humanity on the whole, or against particular human classes, arrangements, and modes of thinking. In some of his writings the politician and the general satirist are seen together. The *Drapier's Letters* and most of the poetical lampoons, exhibit Swift in his direct mood as a party-writer ; in the *Tale of a Tub* we have the ostensible purpose of a partisan masking a reserve of general scepticism ; in the *Battle of the Books* we have a satire partly personal to individuals, partly with a reference to a prevailing tone of opinion ; in the *Voyage to Laputa* we have a satire on a great class of men ; and in the *Voyages to Lilliput* and *Brobdingnag*, and still more in the story of the *Houynhnms* and *Yahoos*, we have human nature itself analysed and laid bare.

Swift took no care of his writings, never acknowledged some of them, never collected them, and suffered them to find their way about the world as chance, demand, and the piracy of publishers directed. As all know, it is in his character as a humorist, an inventor of the preposterous as a medium for the reflective, and above all as a master of irony, that he takes his place as one of the chiefs of English literature. There can be no doubt that, as regards the literary form which he affected most, he took hints from Rabelais, as the greatest original in the realm of the absurd. Sometimes, as in his description of the Strulbrugs in the *Voyage to Laputa*, he approaches the ghastly power of that writer ; on the whole, however, there is more of stern English realism in him, and less of sheer riot and wildness. Sometimes, however, Swift throws off the guise of the humorist, and speaks seriously



and in his own name. On such occasions we find ourselves simply in the presence of a man of strong, sagacious, and thoroughly English mind, content, as is the habit of Englishmen, with vigorous proximate sense, expressed in plain and rather coarse idiom. For the speculative he shows in these cases neither liking nor aptitude; he takes obvious reasons and arguments as they come to hand, and uses them in a robust, downright Saxon manner. In one respect he stands out conspicuously even among plain Saxon writers—his total freedom from cant. Johnson's advice to Boswell, "above all things to clear his mind of cant," was perhaps never better illustrated than in the case of Dean Swift. Indeed, it might be given as a summary definition of Swift's character that he had cleared his mind of cant, without having succeeded in filling the void with song. It was Swift's intense hatred of cant—cant in religion, cant in morality, cant in literature—that occasioned many of those peculiarities which shock people in his writings. His principle being to view things as they are, irrespective of all the accumulated cant of orators and poets, he naturally prosecuted his investigations into those classes of circumstances which orators and poets have omitted as unsuitable for their purposes. If they had viewed men as angels, he would view them as Yahoos. If they had placed the springs of action among the fine phrases and the sublimities, he would trace them down into their secret connexions with the bestial and the obscene. Hence—as much as for any of those physiological reasons which some of his biographers assign for it—his undisguised delight in filth. And hence, also, probably—seeing that among the forms of cant he included the traditional manner of speaking of women in their relations to men—his studious contempt, whether in writing for men or women, of all the accustomed decencies. It was not only the more obvious forms of cant, however, that Swift had in aversion. Even to that minor form of cant which consists in the "trite" he gave no quarter. Whatever was habitually said by the majority of people, seemed to him, for that very reason, not worthy of being said at all, much less put into print. A considerable portion of his writings, as, for

example, his *Tritical Essay on the Faculties of the Mind*, and his *Art of Polite Conversation*—in the one of which he strings together a series of the most threadbare maxims and quotations to be found in books, offering the compilation as an original disquisition of his own ; and, in the other, imitates the insipidity of ordinary table-talk in society—may be regarded as showing a systematic determination on his part to turn the trite into ridicule. Hence, in his own writings, though he abstains from the profound, he never falls into the commonplace. Apart from all Swift's other merits, there are to be found scattered through his writings not a few distinct propositions of an innovative and original character respecting our social arrangements. We have seen his doctrine as to the education of women ; and we may mention, as an instance of the same kind, his denunciation of the institution of standing armies as incompatible with freedom. Curiously enough, also, it was Swift's belief that, Yahoos as we are, the world is always in the right.

# CHATTERTON.

A STORY OF THE YEAR 1770.\*

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## PART I.—BRISTOL.

### CHAPTER I.—WILKES AND LIBERTY.

WAS there ever a time that did not think highly of its own importance? Was there ever a time when the world did not believe itself to be going to pieces, and when alarming pamphlets on “the present crisis” did not lie unbought on the counters of the booksellers? Poor mortals that we are, how we do make the most of our own little portion in the general drama of history! Nor are we quite wrong, after all. There is nothing really to laugh at in our laborious anxieties about this same “present crisis,” which is always happening, and never over. “We live in earnest times”—what is there in the incessant repetition of this stereotyped phrase, but an explicit assertion, as it were, by each generation for itself, that the great sense of life, transmitted already through so many generations, is now, in turn, passing through *it*? The time that we ourselves are alive, the time that our eyes behold the light, and that the breath is strong in our nostrils, that is the crisis for us; and although it belongs to a higher than we to determine the worth of what we do, yet that we should do every thing with a certain amount of vehemence and bustle, seems but the necessary noise of the shuttle, as we weave forth our allotted portion of the general web of existence.

\* A portion of this sketch appeared in the numbers of the *Dublin University Magazine* for July, August, and October, 1851. The rest is now published for the first time.

Well, eighty years ago, there was "a crisis" in England. That was the time, reader, when our great-grandfathers, laudably intent on bringing about your existence and mine, were, for that purpose, paying court to our reluctant great-grandmothers. George III., an obese young sovereign of thirty-three, had then been ten years on the throne. Newspapers were not so numerous as now; parliament was not open to reporters; and had gentlemen of the liberal press been alive, with their present political opinions, every soul of them would have been hanged. Nevertheless, people got on very well; and there was enough for a nation of seven millions to take interest in and talk about, when they were in an inquisitive humour. Lord North, for example, an ungainly country gentleman, with goggle eyes and big cheeks, had just succeeded the Duke of Grafton as the head of a Tory ministry; Lord Chatham, throwing off his gout for the occasion, had, at the age of sixty-two, resumed his place in the public eye as the thundering Jove of the Opposition; Bute and Scotchmen were still said to be sucking the blood of the nation; and Edmund Burke, then in the prime of his strength and intellect, was publishing masterly pamphlets, and trying to construct, under the auspices of the Marquis of Rockingham, a new Whig party. Among the notabilities out of parliament were—Dr. Samuel Johnson, then past his sixty-first year, and a most obstinate old Tory; his friend Sir Joshua, fourteen years younger; Goldy, several years younger still; and Garrick, fifty-four years of age, but as sprightly as ever. In another circle, but not less prominently before the town, were Parson Horne and Mrs. Macaulay; and all England was ringing with the terrible letters of the invisible Junius. But the man of the hour, the hero of the self-dubbed crisis, was John Wilkes.

Arrested in 1763, on account of the publication of No. 45 of the *North Briton*, in which one of the King's speeches had been severely commented on; discharged a few days afterwards in consequence of his privilege as a member of parliament; lifted instantaneously by this accident into an unexampled blaze of popular favour; persecuted all the more on this account by the Court party; at last, in January, 1764,

expelled from his seat in the House of Commons by a vote declaring him to be a seditious libeller ; put on his trial thereafter, before the Court of Queen's Bench, and escaping sentence only by a voluntary flight to France — this squint-eyed personage, known up to that time only as a profligate wit about town, who lived on his wife's money, and fascinated other women in spite of his ugliness, had now been for six years the idol and glory of England. For six years " Wilkes and Forty-five " had been chalked on the walls ; " Wilkes and Liberty " had been the cry of the mobs ; and portraits of Wilkes had hung in the windows of the print-shops. Remembering that he was the champion of liberal opinions, even pious Dissenters had forgotten his atheism and his profligacy. They distinguished, they said, between the man and the cause which he represented.

For a year or two the patriot had been content with the mere echo of this applause as it was wafted to him in Paris ; but, cash failing him there, and the parliament from which he had been ejected having been dissolved, he had returned to England early in 1768, had offered himself as a candidate for the city of London, had lost that election, but had almost instantly afterwards been returned for the county of Middlesex. Hereupon he had ventured to surrender himself to the process of the law ; and the result had been his condemnation, in June, 1768, to pay a fine of 1,000*l.*, and undergo an imprisonment of twenty-two months. Nor had this been all. No sooner had parliament met than it had proceeded to expel the member for Middlesex. Then had begun the tug of war between parliament and the people. Thirteen days after his expulsion, the exasperated electors of Middlesex had again returned Wilkes as their representative, no one having dared to oppose him. Again the house had expelled him, and again the electors had returned him. Not till after the fourth farce of election had the contest ceased. On that occasion three other candidates had presented themselves ; and one of them, Colonel Luttrell, having polled 296 votes, had been declared by the house to be duly elected, notwithstanding that the votes for Wilkes had been four times as numerous. Tremendous

dous then had been the outcry of popular indignation. During the whole of the years 1768 and 1769 "the violation of the right of election by parliamentary despotism" had been the great topic of the country; and in the beginning of 1770 this was still the question of the hour, the question forced by the people into all other discussions, and regarding which all candidates for popular favour, from Chatham himself down to the parish beadle, were obliged distinctly to declare themselves.

Meanwhile, Wilkes was in the King's Bench, Southwark. His consolations, we may suppose, were, that by all this his popularity had been but increased; that Parson Horne and the Society for the protection of the Bill of Rights had organised a subscription in his favour, which would more than pay his fine; and that the whole country was waiting to do him honour on the day when he should step out of prison.

It came at last: Tuesday, the 17th of April, 1770. There was a considerable show of excitement all day in the vicinity of the prison; and it was with some difficulty that the patriot, getting into a hackney-coach late in the afternoon, made his way past the cordial clutches of the mob, into the country. That evening and the next there were huzzas and illuminations in his honour; the house of Beckford, the Lord Mayor, in the then aristocratic region of Soho-square, was conspicuously decorated with the word "Liberty;" and public dinners to celebrate the release of the patriot were held in various parts of the city.

The rejoicings were not confined to London. In many other towns of England there were demonstrations in honour of Wilkes. A list of the chief places may still be culled from the newspapers of the day. From these newspapers we learn, what indeed might have been independently surmised, that not the least eager among the towns of England in this emulous show of regard for Wilkes, was the ancient mercantile city of Bristol. The following appeared in the *Public Advertiser*, as from a Bristol correspondent, on the very day of Wilkes's release.

"*Bristol, April 14th.*—We hear that on Wednesday next, being the day of Mr. Wilkes's enlargement, forty-five persons are to dine at the 'Crown,' in the



passage leading from Broad street to Tower-lane. The entertainment is to consist of two rounds of beef, of 45 lbs. each, two legs of veal, weighing 45 lbs.; two ditto of pork, 45 lbs.; a pig, roasted, 45 lbs.; two puddings of 45 lbs.; 45 loaves; and, to drink, 45 tankards of ale. After dinner, they are to smoke 45 pipes of tobacco, and to drink 45 bowls of punch. Among others, the following toasts are to be given — 1. Long live the King, 2. Long live the supporters of British liberty, 3. The Magistrates of Bristol. And the dinner to be on the table exactly 45 minutes after two o'clock."

Whether this precise dinner, thus announced by the Bristol correspondent of the *Advertiser*, was held or not, must, we fear, remain a mystery; but that there were several dinners in Bristol on the occasion, is quite certain. On Thursday, the 19th, in particular, a public entertainment (possibly the above, with the day altered) was given in honour of the patriot by "an eminent citizen," and attended by many of the most influential men in the place.

Ah! the poetry of coincidences! On that same Thursday evening, while the assembled guests in the "Crown" were clattering their glasses in the hot room, puffing their tobacco-smoke, and making the roof ring with their tipsy uproar, there was walking moodily through the streets of Bristol a young attorney's apprentice, who, four days before, had been discharged from his employment because he had alarmed his master by threatening to commit suicide. This attorney's apprentice was Thomas Chatterton.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE ATTORNEY'S APPRENTICE OF BRISTOL.

IT was in the month of August, 1760, that a poor widow, who supported herself and two children by dressmaking, and by keeping a small day-school in one of the back streets of Bristol, gained admission for her younger child, a boy of seven years and nine months old, into Colston's school, a charitable foundation, similar in some respects to Christ's Hospital in London. The husband of this widow, a rough, drunken fellow, who had been a singer, or sub-chaunter, in the cathedral choir of Bristol, as well as the master of a kind of free school for boys, had died a month or two before his son's birth. An old grandmother, however — either the widow's own mother

or her husband's—was still alive, dependent, in some degree, on the family.

For nearly seven years, or from August, 1760, to July, 1767, the boy remained an inmate of Colston's school, wearing, as the Christ's Hospital boys still do, a blue coat and yellow stockings, and receiving, according to the custom of the institution, such a plain education as might fit him for an ordinary mercantile or mechanical occupation. But, from the very first, the boy was singular. For one thing, he was a prodigious reader. The Bible, theological treatises, scraps of history, old magazines, poetry, whatever in the shape of a printed volume came in his way—all were eagerly pounced upon and devoured; and it was not long before his reputation in this respect enabled him to lay one or two circulating libraries under friendly contribution. Then, again, his temper, people remarked, had something in it quite unusual in one so young. Generally very sullen and silent, he was liable to sudden and unaccountable fits of weeping, as well as to violent fits of rage. He was also extremely secretive, and fond of being alone; and on Saturday and other holiday afternoons, when he was at liberty to go home from school, it was quite a subject of speculation with his mother, Mrs. Chatterton, and her acquaintances, what the boy could be doing, sitting alone for hours, as was his habit, in a garret full of all kinds of out-of-the-way lumber.

When he was about ten years of age, it became known to some of his seniors that the little Blue-coat was in the habit of writing verses. His first attempt in this way had been a pious little achievement, entitled "On the Last Epiphany; or, Christ's coming to Judgment;" and so proud had he been of this performance; and so ambitious of seeing it in print, that he had boldly dropped it, one Saturday afternoon, into the letter-box of *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, a weekly newspaper in high local repute. It accordingly appeared in the columns of that newspaper on the 8th of January, 1763. From that day Chatterton was a sworn poet. Piece after piece was dropped by him during a period of three years into the letter-box of the accommodating *Journal*. Only one of

these, however, is it necessary to mention particularly—a little lampoon, printed the 7th of January, 1764, and entitled “The Churchwarden and the Apparition; a Fable.” A Mr. Joseph Thomas, a brick-maker by trade, chancing in that year to hold the office of churchwarden for the parish of St. Mary Redcliffe, had greatly scandalized the public mind by causing the old churchyard to be levelled, and the surplus earth and clay to be carted away, as people said, for his own professional uses. For this outrage on decorum he was much attacked by the local press, and nowhere more severely than in the above-mentioned verses of the little Blue-coat; in whom, by-the-bye, there must have been a kind of hereditary resentment of such a piece of sacrilege, seeing that his ancestors, the Chattertons, had been sextons of the church of St. Mary Redcliffe for a period of one hundred and fifty years continuously. The office had, in fact, only passed out of the family on the death of an older brother of his father, named John Chatterton.

The date does not seem quite certain, but it was probably nearly three years after this occurrence, and when Chatterton was above fourteen years of age, and one of the senior boys in the Blue-coat School, that he stepped, one afternoon, into the shop of a Mr. Burgum, partner of a Mr. Catcott, in the pewter trade.

“I have found out a secret about you, Mr. Burgum,” he said, going up to the pewterer at his desk.

“Indeed: what is it?” said Mr. Burgum.

“That you are descended from one of the noblest families in England.”

“I did not know it,” said the victim.

“It is true, though,” said Chatterton; “and to prove it, I will bring you your pedigree written out, as I have traced it by the help of books of the peerage and old parchments.”

Accordingly, a few days afterwards, he again called, and presented the astonished pewterer with a manuscript copy-book, headed in large text, as follows: “Account of the Family of the De Bergham, from the Norman Conquest to this time; collected from original Records, Tournament-rolls, and

the Heralds of March and Garter Records, by T. Chatterton." In this document the Burgum pedigree was elaborately traced up, through no end of great names and illustrious intermarriages, to one "Simon de Seyncte Lyze, *alias* Senliz," who had come into England with the Conqueror; married a daughter of the Saxon chief, Waltheof; become possessed, among other properties, of Burgham Castle, in Northumberland; and been eventually created Earl of Northampton.

Pleased with the honours thus unexpectedly thrust upon him, the pewterer gave the Blue-coat five shillings for his trouble. To show his gratitude, Chatterton soon returned with "A Continuation of the Account of the Family of the De Bergham, from the Norman Conquest to this Time." In the original pedigree, the young genealogist had judiciously stopped short at the sixteenth century. In the supplement, however, he ventures as far down as the reign of Charles II., back to which point the pewterer is left to supply the links for himself. But the chief feature in the pedigree, as elaborated in the second document, is, that, in addition to other great names, it contains a poet. This poet, whose name was John De Bergham, was a monk of the Cistercian order, in Bristol; he had been educated in Oxford, and was "one of the greatest ornaments of the age in which he lived." He wrote several books, and translated some part of the Iliad, under the title of "Romance of Troy." To give Mr. Burgum some idea of the poetic style of this distinguished man, his ancestor, there was inserted a short poem of his in the ancient dialect, entitled "The Romaunte of the Cnychte;" and to render the meaning of the poem more intelligible, there was appended a modern metrical paraphrase of it by Chatterton himself.

By the *éclat* of this wonderful piece of genealogical and heraldic ingenuity done for Mr. Burgum, as well as by the occasional exercise in a more or less public manner of his talent for verse-making, Chatterton, already recognised as the first for attainments among all the lads in Colston's school, appears to have won a kind of reputation with a few persons of the pewterer's stamp out of doors—honest people,



with small pretensions to literature themselves, but willing to encourage a clever boy whose mother was in poor circumstances.

It was probably through the influence of such persons that, after having been seven years at the school, he was removed from it in July, 1767, to be apprenticed to Mr. John Lambert, a Bristol attorney. The trustees of Colston's school paid to Lambert, on the occasion, a premium of ten pounds; and the arrangement was, that Chatterton should be bound to him for seven years, during which period he was to board and lodge in Mr. Lambert's house, his mother, however, undertaking to wash and mend for him. There was no salary; but, as usually happens in such cases, there were probably means in Bristol by which a lad writing, as Chatterton did, a neat clerk's hand, could hope to earn, now and then, a few stray shillings. At any rate, he had the prospect of finding himself, at the end of seven years, in a fair way to be a Bristol attorney.

Lambert's office-hours were from eight in the morning till eight in the evening, with an interval for dinner; from eight till ten in the evening the apprentice was at liberty, but he was required to be home at his master's house, which was at some distance from the office, punctually by ten. An indignity which he felt very much, and more than once complained of, was that, by the household arrangements, which were under the control of an old lady, his master's mother, he was sent to take his meals in the kitchen, and made to sleep with the footboy. To set against this, however, there was the advantage of plenty of spare time; for as Lambert's business was not very extensive, the apprentice was often left alone in the office with nothing special to do, and at liberty to amuse himself as he liked. From copying letters and precedents, he could turn to *Camden's Britannia*, an edition of which lay on the office-shelves, to *Holinshed's Chronicles*, to *Speght's Chaucer*, to *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, or to any other book that he could borrow from a library, and smuggle in for his private recreation. Sometimes, also, the tradition goes, his master, entering the office unexpectedly,

would catch him writing verses, and would lecture him on the subject. Once the offence was still more serious. An anonymous abusive letter had been sent to Mr. Warner, the head-master of Colston's school, and by the texture of the paper, and other evidences, this letter was traced to the ex-Bluecoat of Mr. Lambert's office, whose reasons for sending it had probably been personal. On this occasion his master was so exasperated as to strike him.

A young attorney's apprentice, of proud and sullen temper, discontented with his situation, ambitious, conscious of genius, yet treated as a boy and menial servant—such was Chatterton during the two years that followed his removal from the Blue-coat School. To this add the want of pocket-money; for busy as he was with his master's work and his own secret exercises in the way of literature, it is still authentically known that he found time of an evening not only to drop in pretty regularly at his mother's house, but also to do as other attorneys' apprentices did, and prosecute little amusements such as all apprentices like to find practicable. Altogether, the best glimpse we have of Chatterton in his commoner aspect as an attorney's apprentice in Bristol, is that which we get from a letter written by him, during his first year with Mr. Lambert, to a youth named Baker, who had been his chum at Colston's school, and had emigrated to America. Baker had written to him from South Carolina, informing him, amongst other things, that he had fallen in love with an American belle, of the name of Hoyland, whose charms had obscured his memory of the Bristol fair ones; and begging him, it would also appear, to woo the Muses in his favour, and transmit him across the Atlantic a poem or two, to be presented to Miss Hoyland. Chatterton complies, and sends a long letter, beginning with a few amatory effusions to Miss Hoyland, such as Baker wanted, and concluding thus:—

“March 6th, 1768.

“DEAR FRIEND,—I must now close my poetical labours, my master being returned from London. You write in a very entertaining style; though I am afraid mine will be to the contrary. Your celebrated Miss Rumsey is going to be married to Mr. Fowler, as he himself informs me. Pretty children!



about to enter into the comfortable yoke of matrimony, to beat their liberty; just *à propos* to the old law, but out of the frying-pan into the fire. For a lover, heavens mend him! but for a husband oh excellent! What a female Machiavel this Miss Rumsey is! A very good mistress of nature, to discover a *demon* in the habit of a parson; to find a spirit so well adapted to the humour of an English wife; that is, one who takes off his hat to every person he chances to meet, to show his staring horns. "O *merable*, what will human nature degenerate into? Fowler aforesaid declares he makes a scruple of conscience of being too free with Miss Rumsey before marriage. There's a gallant for you. Why, a girl with anything of the woman would despise him for it. But no more of this. I am glad you approve of the ladies in Charlestown, and am obliged to you for the compliment of including me in your happiness. My friendship is as firm as the white rock when the black waves war around it, and the waters burst on its hoary top; when the driving wind ploughs the sable sea, and the rising waves aspire to the clouds, turning with the rattling hail. So much for heroics; to speak plain English, I am, and ever will be, your unalterable friend. I did not give your love to Miss Rumsey, having not seen her in private, and in public she will not speak to me, because of her great love to Fowler, and on another occasion. I have been violently in love these three-and-twenty times since your departure, and not a few times came off victorious. I am obliged to you for your curiosity, and shall esteem it very much, not on account of itself, but as coming from you. The poems, &c., on Miss Hoyland, I wish better, for her sake and yours. The 'Tournament' I have only one canto of, which I send herewith; the remainder is entirely lost. I am, with the greatest regret, going to subscribe myself, your faithful and constant friend till death do us part,

"THOMAS CHATTERTON.

"Mr. Baker, Charlestown,  
"South Carolina."

When Chatterton wrote this letter he was fifteen years and four months old. To its tone, as illustrative of certain parts of his character, we shall have yet to allude; meanwhile let us attend to the reference made in it to the *Tournament*, one canto of which is said to be sent along with it. The poem here meant is doubtless the antique dramatic fragment published among Chatterton's writings in the assumed guise of an original poem of the fifteenth century, descriptive of a tournament held at Bristol in the reign of Edward I. From the manner of the allusion it is clear that as early as this period of Chatterton's life, that is, before the close of the first year of his apprenticeship, he was in the habit of showing about to some of his private friends poems in an antique style, which he represented as genuine antiques, copied from old parchments in his possession. It was not, however, till about six months after the date of the foregoing epistle that he made his *début* in the professed character of an antiquarian and proprietor of ancient manuscripts, before the good folks of Bristol generally.

In September, 1768, a new bridge was opened at Bristol with much civic pomp and ceremony. While the excitement was still fresh, the antiquaries of the town were startled by the appearance, in *Felix Farley's Journal*, of a very interesting account of the ceremonies that had attended the similar opening, several centuries before, of the old bridge, which had just been superseded. This account, communicated by an anonymous correspondent signing himself "Dunhelmus Bristolensis," purported to be taken from an old manuscript, contemporary with the occurrence. It described how the opening of the old bridge had taken place on a "Fridaie;" how, on that "Fridaie," the ceremonies had begun by one "Master Greggorie Dalbenye" going "aboute the tollynge of the tenth clock," to inform "Master Mayor all thyngs were prepared;" how the procession to the bridge had consisted, first, of "two Beadils streying fresh stre," then of a man dressed as "a Saxon Elderman," then of "a mickle strong manne in armour carrying a huge anlance (*i. e.* sword)," then of "six claryons and minstrels," then of "Master Mayor" on a white horse, then of "the Eldermen and Cittie Brothers" on sable horses; and finally, of "the preests, parish, mendicant, and seculor, some synging Saincte Warburgh's song, others sounding claryons thereto, and otherssome citrialles;" how, when the procession had reached the bridge, the "manne with the anlance" took his station on a mound reared in the middle of it; how the rest gathered round him, "the preestes and freers, all in white albs, making a most goodlie shewe," and singing "the song of Saincte Baldwyn:" how, when this was done, "the manne on the top threwe with greet mycht his anlance into the see, and the claryons sounded an auntiant charge and forloyn;" how then there was more singing, and, at the town-cross, a Latin sermon "preeched by Ralph de Blundeville:" and how the day was ended by festivities, the performance of the play of "The Knyghtes of Bristow" by the friars of St. Augustine, and the lighting of a great bonfire on Kynwulph Hill.

The antiquaries of the town were eager to know the anony-

mous "Dunhelmus Bristoliensis" who had contributed this perfectly novel document to the archives of Bristol; and they succeeded in identifying him with Mr. Lambert's singular apprentice,—the discoverer, as they would now learn, of a similar piece of antiquity in the shape of a pedigree for Mr. Burgum, the pewterer. Examined, coaxed, and threatened on the subject of his authority, Chatterton prevaricated, but at last adhered to the assertion that the manuscript in question was one of a collection which had belonged to his father, who had obtained them from the large chest or coffer in the muniment-room of the church of St. Mary Redcliffe. And here, whether owing to his obstinacy or to the stupidity of the inquisitors, the matter was allowed to rest.

The general impression that followed the discovery of the author of the communication relative to the opening of the old bridge, was that Mr. Lambert's apprentice was really a very extraordinary lad, who, besides being a poet in a small way, was also a dabbler in antiquities, and had somehow or other become possessed, as he said himself, of valuable materials respecting the history of Bristol. Accordingly he became, in some sense, a local celebrity. Among the persons that took him by the hand were one or two of some name and importance in Bristol—Mr. George Catcott, the partner of Mr. Burgum; his brother, the Rev. Alexander Catcott; and Mr. Barrett, a surgeon in good practice. Two of these had a reputation as literary men. The Rev. Mr. Catcott had written a book in support of the Noachian view of the Deluge, and was, besides, according to Chatterton's delineations of him, a kind of oracle on scientific points at Bristol tea-parties, where "shewing wondering cits his fossil store," he would expound his orthodox theory of springs, rocks, mountains, and strata. What the reverend Catcott was at refined tea-parties, his coarser brother, the pewterer, was at taverns. Chatterton thus hits him off:—

"So at Llewellyn's your great brother sits,  
The laughter of his tributary wits,  
Ruling the noisy multitude with ease,—  
Empties his pint, and sputters his decrees."

Mr. Barrett, the surgeon, on the other hand, was a sedate professional man, of repute as an antiquarian, and known to be engaged in writing a history of Bristol.

The two Catcotts, Barrett, and Burgum, with some others, known either through their means or independently of them; Mr. Matthew Mease, a vintner; Messrs. Allen and Broderip, two musicians and church organists; the Rev. Mr. Broughton; Mr. Clayfield, a distiller, "a worthy, generous man;" Mr. Alcock, a miniature painter; T. Cary, a pipe-maker; H. Kator, a sugar-baker; W. Smith, a player; J. Rudhall, an apothecary's apprentice; such, so far as we can collect their names, were the principal acquaintances and associates of Chatterton during his apprenticeship with Mr. Lambert. There are references also to some acquaintances of the other sex: Mrs. Baker, Mrs. Carty, Miss Webb, Miss Sandford, Miss Bush, Miss Thatcher, Miss Hill, &c., not to omit the most conspicuous of all, and the only one between whom and Chatterton one is able to surmise a sentimental relation, that "female Machiavel, Miss Rumsey," so spitefully alluded to in the letter to the transatlantic Mr. Baker. The Catcotts, Barrett, and Burgum, however, come most into notice. On the Rev. Mr. Catcott, Chatterton, we are to suppose, drops in occasionally, to listen to a prelection on fossils and the Deluge; Burgum and the other Catcott he may sometimes meet at Matthew Mease's, where Cattott acts the chairman; and from Barrett, calling on him at his surgery once a week or so, he receives sensible advices as to the propriety of making poetry subordinate to his profession, as well as (what he greatly prefers) the loan of medical and uncommon books.

It is to this little public of heterogeneous individuals—clergymen, surgeons, tradesmen, vintners, and young apprentices like himself—that Chatterton produces his Rowley poems, and other antique writings. As early as the date of the Burgum pedigree, we have seen, he had ventured to bring out one antique piece, the "Romaunte of the Cnychte," by the so-called John de Bergham. To this had been added, as early as the commencement of 1768, the "Tournament," the poem alluded to in the letter to Baker; as well as, perhaps, other

pieces. Farther, in the account of the opening of the old bridge (September, 1768), references are introduced to the "Songe of Sainte Warburghe," and the "Songe of Sainte Baldwynne," showing that these antiques must have been then extant. In short, there is evidence that, before the conclusion of his sixteenth year, Chatterton had produced at least a portion of his alleged antiques. But the year that followed, or from the close of 1768 to the close of 1769, seems to have been his most prolific period in this respect. In or about the winter of 1768—9, that is, when he had just completed his sixteenth year, he produced, in the circle of his friends above mentioned, his ballad of "The Bristowe Tragedie;" his "tragical interlude" of "Ælla," in itself a large poem; his "Elinoure and Juga," a fine pastoral poem of the wars of the Roses; and numerous other pieces of all forms and lengths, in the same antique spelling. Then, also, did he first distinctly give the account of those pieces to which he ever afterwards adhered—to wit, that they were, for the greater part, the compositions of Thomas Rowley, a priest of Bristol of the fifteenth century, many of whose manuscripts, preserved in the muniment-room of the church of St. Mary, had come into his hands.

The Catcotts were the persons most interested in the recovered manuscripts; and whenever Chatterton had a new poem of Rowley's on his hands, it was usually to Mr. George Catcott that he first gave a copy of it. To Mr. Barrett, on the other hand, he usually imparted such scraps of ancient prose records, deeds, accounts of old churches, &c., as were likely to be of use to that gentleman in preparing his history of Bristol. So extensive, in fact, were the surgeon's obligations to the young man, that he seems to have thought it impossible to requite them otherwise than by a pecuniary recompense. Accordingly, there is evidence of an occasional guinea or half-guinea having been transferred from the pocket of Mr. Barrett to that of Chatterton on the score of literary assistance rendered him in the progress of his work. From the Catcotts, too, Chatterton seems, on similar grounds, to have now and then obtained something. That they were not



so liberal as they might have been, however, the following bill in Chatterton's handwriting will show:—

" Mr. G. Catcott,		" To the Executors of T. Rowley.		
" To pleasure recd. in readg. his Historic works . .		£5	5	0
<hr/>		his Poetic works . . .	£5	5 0
			<hr/>	
			£10 10 0"	

Whether the above was splenetically sent to Catcott, or whether it was only drawn up by Chatterton in a cashless moment by way of frolic, is not certain; the probability, however, is, that, if it was sent, the pewterer did not think it necessary to discharge it. Yet he was not such a hard subject as his partner, Burgum, whom Chatterton (no doubt after sufficient trial) represents as stinginess itself.

But it was not only as a young man of extensive antiquarian knowledge and of decided literary talent that Chatterton was known in Bristol. As the transcriber of the Rowley poems, and the editor of curious pieces of information, derived from ancient manuscripts which he was understood to have in his possession, the Catcotts, Barrett, and the rest, had no fault to find with him; but there were other phases in which he appeared, by no means so likely to recommend him to their favour, or to the favour of such other influential persons in the community as might have been disposed to patronise modesty in combination with youth and literature.

In a town of 70,000 inhabitants (which was about the population of Bristol eighty years ago) it must be remembered that all the public characters are marked men. The mayor, the various aldermen and common-councilmen, the city clergymen, the chief grocers, bankers, and tradesmen, the teachers of the public schools, &c., are all recognised as they pass along the streets; and their peculiarities, physical and moral, such as the red nose of Alderman Such-an-one, the wheezy voice of the Rev. Such-another, and the blustering self-importance of citizen Such-a-third, are perfectly familiar to the civic imagination. Now, it is the most natural of all things for a young man in such a town, just arrived at a tolerable conceit of himself, and determined to have a place



some day in Mr. Craik's "Pursuit of Knowledge under difficulties," to be seized with a tremendous disrespect for everything locally sacred, and to delight in promulgating it. What nonsense they do talk in the town-council; what a miserable set of mercantile rogues are the wealthy citizens; what an absence of liberality and high general intelligence there is in the whole procedure of the community—these are the common-places (often, it must be confessed, true enough) through which the high-spirited young native of a middle-class British town must almost necessarily pass, on his way to a higher appreciation of men and things. Through the sorrows of Lichfield, the Lichfield youth realizes how it is that all creation groaneth and travaileth; and pinched by the inconveniences of Dundee, the aspirant who is there nursed into manhood turns down his shirt-collar at all things, and takes a Byronic view of the entire universe.

Chatterton was specially liable to this discontent with all around him. Of a dogged, sullen, and passionate disposition, not without a considerable spice of malice; treated as a boy, yet with a brain consciously the most powerful in Bristol; sadly in want of pocket-money for purposes more or less questionable, and having hardly any means of procuring it—he took his revenge out in satire against all that was respectable in Bristol. If Mr. Thomas Harris, then the Right Worshipful Mayor of the city, passed him on the pavement, either ignorant what a youth of genius he was pushing aside, or looking down somewhat askance, as a mayor will do at an attorney's apprentice that will not take off his hat when he is expected, the thought that probably arose in his breast was, "You are a purse-proud fool, Mr. Mayor, and I have more sense in my little finger than you have in your whole body." If there was a civic dinner, and Chatterton was told of it, the remark would be, what feeding there would be among the aldermen and city brothers; what guzzling of claret; and what after-dinner speeches by fellows that could not pronounce their H's, and hardly knew how to read. If he chanced to sit in church, hearing the Rev. Dr. Cutts Barton, then Dean of Bristol, preach, what would pass in his mind would be,

“ You are a drowsy old rogue, Cutts, and have no more religion in you than a sausage.” And even when Newton, the Bishop of the diocese, distinguished prelate as he was, made his appearance in the pulpit, he would not be safe from the excoriations of this young critic in the distant pew. Chatterton’s own friends and acquaintances, too, came in for their share of his sarcasms. Lambert, we believe, he hated ; and we have seen how he could wreak a personal grudge on an old teacher. The Rev. Mr. Catcott, not a bad fellow in the main, he soon set down, in his own private opinion, as a narrow-minded parson, with no force or philosophy, conceited with his reputation at tea-parties, and a dreadful bore with his fossils and his theory of the Deluge. His brother, the unclerical Catcott, again, had probably more wit and vigour, but dogmatised insufferably over his beer ; Burgum was a vain, stingy, ungrammatical goose ; and Mr. Barrett, with all his good intentions, was too fond of giving common-place advices. In short, Bristol was a vile place, where originality or genius, or even ordinary culture and intelligence, had no chance of being appreciated ; and to spend one’s existence there would be but a life-long attempt to teach a certain class of animals the value and the beauty of pearls !

Poor unhappy youth ! how, through the mist and din of eighty years past and gone since then, I recognise thee walking in the winter evenings of 1769-70, through the dark streets of Bristol, or out into its dark environs, ruminating such evil thoughts as these ! And what, constituting myself for the moment the mouthpiece of all that society has since pronounced on thy case, should I, leaping back over long years to place myself at thy side, whisper to thee by way of counsel or reproach ?—

“ Persist ; be content ; be more modest ; think less of forbidden indulgences ; give up telling lies ; attend to your master’s business ; and if you *will* cherish the fire of genius, and become a poet and a man of name, like the Johnsons, the Goldsmiths, the Churchills, and others whom you think yourself born to equal or surpass, at least study patience, have faith in honourable courses, and realize, above all, that wealth

and fame are vanity, and that whether you succeed or fail it will be all the same a hundred years after this."

"Easily said," thou wouldst answer; "cheaply advised! I also could speak as you do; if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you. That the present will pass, and that a hundred years hence all the tragedy or all the farce will have been done and over true; I know it. Nevertheless I know also that minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, the present must be moved through, and exhausted! 'A hundred years after this!' Did not Manlius, the Roman, know it; and yet was there not a moment in the history of the world—a moment to be fully felt and gone through by Manlius—when, flung from the Tarpeian rock, he, yet living, hung halfway between his gaping executioners above and his ruddy death among the stones below? 'A hundred years after this!' Pompeius, the Roman, knew it; and yet was there not a moment in the history of the world—a moment fully to be endured by Pompeius—when, reading in the treacherous boat, he sat halfway between the ship that bore his destinies and his funeral pile on the Libyan shore? Centuries back in the past these moments now lie engulfed; but what is that to me? It is my turn now; here I am, wretched in this beastly Bristol, where Savage was allowed to starve in prison; and, by the very fact that I live, I have a right to my solicitude!"

Obstinate boy! is there then aught that can still, with some show of sense, be advised to you? Seek a friend. Leave the Catcotts, lay and clerical, the Burgums, the Barretts, the Matthew Meases, and the rest of them, and seek some one true friend, such as surely even Bristol can supply, of about the same age as yourself, or, what were better, somewhat older. See him daily, walk with him, smoke with him, laugh with him, discuss religion with him, hear his experiences, show your poetry to him, and, above all, make a clean breast to him of your various delinquencies. Or, more efficient perhaps still, fall really in love. Avoid the Miss Rumseys, and find out some beauty of a better kind, to whom, with or without hope, you can vow the future of your noblest heart. Find

her; walk beneath her window; catch glimpses of her; dream of her; if fortune favours, woo her, and (true you are but seventeen!) win her. Bristol will then be a paradise; its sky will be lightsome, its streets beautiful, its mayor tolerable, its clergy respectable, and all its warehouses palaces!

Is this also nonsense? Well, then, my acquaintance with general biography enables me to tell you of one particular family at this moment living in Bristol, with which it might be well for you to get acquainted. Mr. Barrett might be able to introduce you. The family I mean is that of the Mores, five sisters, who keep a boarding-school for young ladies in Park-street, "the most flourishing establishment of its kind in the west of England." The Miss Mores, as you know, are praised by all the mothers in Bristol as extremely clever and accomplished young women; and one of them, Miss Hannah, is, like yourself, a writer of verses, and, like yourself, destined to literary celebrity. Now I do not wish to be mischievous; but seeing that posterity will wish that you two, living as you did in the same town, should at least have met and spoken with each other, might I suggest a notion to you? Could you not elope with Hannah More? True, she is seven years your senior, extremely sedate, and the very last person in the world to be guilty of any nonsense with an attorney's apprentice. Nevertheless, try. Just think of the train of consequences—the whole boarding-school in a flutter; all Bristol scandalised; paragraphs in *Felix Farley's Journal*; and posterity effectually cheated of two things, the tragic termination of your own life, and the admirable old maidenhood of hers!

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Chatterton did not conceal his contempt from the very persons it was most likely to offend. Known not only as a transcriber of ancient English poetry, but also as a poet in his own person, he began to support his reputation in the latter character by producing from time to time, along with his Rowley poems, certain lengthy compositions of his own in a modern satirical vein. In these compositions, which were written after the manner of Churchill, there was the strangest possible jumble of crude Whig politics and personal scurrility

against local notabilities. What effect they were likely to have on Chatterton's position in his native town, may be inferred from a specimen or two. How would Broderip, the organist, like this?—

“ While Broderip's humdrum symphonies of flats  
Rival the harmony of midnight cats.”

Or the lay Catcott this allusion to a professional feat of his in laying the topstone of a spire?—

“ Catcott is very fond of talk and fame—  
His wish a perpetuity of name ;  
Which to procure, a pewter altar's made  
To bear his name and signify his trade ;  
In pomp burlesqued the rising spire to head,  
To tell futurity a pewterer's dead.”

And how could the clerical Catcott like this reference to his orthodoxy?—

“ Might we not, Catcott, then infer from hence  
Your zeal for Scripture hath devoured your sense ?”

Or what would the mayor say to this?—

“ Let Harris wear his self-sufficient air,  
Nor dare remark, for Harris is a mayor.”

Or the civic dignity of Bristol generally to this?—

“ 'Tis doubtful if her aldermen can read :  
This of a certainty the muse may tell,  
None of her common-councilmen can spell.”

Clearly enough an attorney's apprentice that was in the habit of showing about such verses was not in the way to procure patronage and goodwill. If, however, any of his friends remonstrated with him, his answer was ready :—

“ Damn'd narrow notions, tending to disgrace  
The boasted reason of the human race !  
Bristol may keep her prudent maxims still ;  
But know, my saving friends, I never will.  
The composition of my soul is made  
Too great for servile, avaricious trade ;  
When, raving in the lunacy of ink,  
I catch the pen, and publish what I think.”

Accordingly Chatterton continued to support, in the eyes of the portion of the community of Bristol that knew him, a two-fold character—that on the one hand of an enthusiastic youth with much antiquarian knowledge, the possessor of many



antique manuscripts, chiefly poetry of the fifteenth century ; and that on the other of an ill-conditioned boy of spiteful temper, the writer of somewhat clever but very scurrilous verses. Nay, more, it was observable that the latter character was growing upon him, apparently at the expense of the former ; for while, up to his seventeenth year (1768-9), his chief recreation seemed to be in his antiques and Rowley MSS., after that date he seemed to throw his antiques aside, and devote all his time to imitations of the satires of Churchill, under such names as *The Consuliad*, *Kew Gardens*, &c. And here the reader must permit me a little *Essay or disquisitional Interleaf on the character and writings of Chatterton*.

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ALL thinking persons have now agreed to abandon that summary method of dealing with human character according to which unusual and eccentric courses of action are attributed to mere caprices on the part of the individuals concerned—mere obstinate determinations to go out of the common route.

“ The dog, to gain some private ends,  
Went mad, and bit the man,”

is a maxim less in repute than it once was. In such cases as that of Chatterton, it is now believed, deeper causes are always operating than the mere wish to deceive people, and make a figure.

Now, in the case of Chatterton, it appears to us, we must first of all take for granted an extraordinary natural precocity or prematurity of the faculties. We are aware that there is a prejudice against the use of this hypothesis. But why should it be so? How otherwise can we represent to ourselves the cause of that diversity which we see in men than by going deeper than all that we know of pedigree, and conceiving the birth of every new soul to be, as it were, a distinct creative act of the unseen Spirit? That now, in some Warwickshire village, the birth should be a Shakespeare ; and that, again, in the poor posthumous child of a dissipated Bristol choir-singer, the tiny body should be shaken by the surcharge



of soul within it, are not miracles in themselves, but only variations in the great standing miracle that there should be birth at all. Nor with the idea of precocity is it necessary to associate that either of disease or of insanity. There was nothing in Chatterton to argue disease in the ordinary sense, or to indicate that, had he lived, he might not, like Pope or Tasso, who were also precocious, have gone on steadily increasing in ability till the attainment of a sound old age. And though it seems certain that there was a tendency to madness in the Chatterton blood—Chatterton's sister, Mrs. Newton, having afterwards had an attack of insanity—we think that the use of this fact by Southey and others to explain the tenor of Chatterton's life, has been too hasty and inconsiderate. A medical friend of ours avers that he never knew a man of genius who had not some aunt or other in a lunatic asylum, or at least fit for one; and so long as we can account for Chatterton's singularities in any other way, we see no reason, any more than in the similar instance of Charles Lamb, why we should attribute them to what was at the utmost only a dormant, or possibly about to be developed, taint of madness in his constitution.

Assuming, then, that Chatterton, without being either a mere *lusus naturæ*, or insane, was simply a child of very extraordinary endowments, we would point out, as the predominant feature in his character, his remarkable veneration for the antique. In the boyhood even of Sir Walter Scott, born as he was in the very midst of ballads and traditions, we see no manifestation of a love of the past and the historic nearly so strong as that which possessed Chatterton from his infancy. The earliest form in which this constitutional peculiarity appeared in him seems to have been a fondness for the ecclesiastical antiquities of his native city, and, above all, an attachment to the old Gothic Church of St. Mary Redcliffe.

Some time ago we saw in a provincial Scottish newspaper an obituary notice of a poor idiot named John M'Bey, who had been for about sixty years a prominent character in the village of Huntly, Aberdeenshire. Where the poor creature had been born, no one knew; he had been found, when

apparently about ten years old, wandering among the Gartly Hills, and had been brought by some country people into the village. Here, "supported by the kindness of several families, at whose kitchen-tables he regularly took his place at one or other of the meals of the day," he continued to reside ever after a conspicuous figure in the schoolboy recollections of all the inhabitants for more than half a century. The "shaggy carrotty head, the vacant stare, the idle trots and aimless walks of 'Jock,' could yet," said the notice, "be recalled in a moment" by all that knew him. "At an early period of his history," proceeded the notice, "he had formed a strong affection for the bell in the old ruined church of Ruthven, in the parish of Cairnie; and many were the visits he paid to that object of, to him, surpassing interest. Having dubbed it with the name of '*Wow*,' he embraced every opportunity at funerals to get a pull of the rope, interpreting the double peals, in his own significant language, to mean, 'Come hame, come hame.' Every funeral going to that churchyard was known to him; and, till his old age, he was generally the first person that appeared on the ground. The emblems of his favourite bell, in bright yellow, were sewed on his garments; and woe to the school-boy that would utter a word in depreciation of his favourite. When near his end, he was asked how he felt. He said 'he was ga'in awa' to the *wow*, nae to come back again.' After his death, he was laid in his favourite burying-place, within sound of his cherished bell."

Do not despise this little story, reader. To our mind it illustrates much. As this poor idiot, debarred from all the general concerns of life, and untaught in other people's tenets, had invented a religion for himself, setting up as a central object in his own narrow circle of images and fancies an old ruined belfry, which had somehow (who knows through what horror of maternity?) caught his sense of mystery, clinging to this object with the whole tenacity of his affections, and even devising symbols by which it might be ever present to him; so, with more complex and less rude accompaniments, does the precocious boy of Bristol seem to have related himself to the Gothic fabric near which he first saw the light. This

church was his fetich, his "wow." It was through it, as through a metaphorical gateway, that his imagination worked itself back into the great field of the past, so as to expatiate on the ancient condition of his native "Brystowe" and the whole olden time of England.

This is no fancy of ours. "Chatterton," says one of his earliest acquaintances, the Mr. William Smith above mentioned, "was particularly fond of walking in the fields, particularly in Redcliffe meadows, and of talking of his manuscripts, and sometimes reading them there. There was one spot in particular, full in view of the church, in which he seemed to take peculiar delight. He would frequently lay himself down, fix his eyes upon the church, and seem as if he were in a kind of trance; then, on a sudden, he would tell me, 'That steeple was burnt down by lightning; that was the place where they formerly acted plays.'" To the same effect, also, many allusions to the Church in the Rowley poems; thus:—

"Thou seest this maestrie of a human hand,  
The pride of Brystowe and the western land,"

And here we may remind the reader of a circumstance mentioned above, namely, that the ancestors of Chatterton had, for a hundred and fifty years, been sextons of this same Church of St. Mary Redcliffe, and that the office had only passed out of the family on the death of his father's elder brother, John. Chatterton's father, too, it should be remembered, was a choir-singer in the church; and Chatterton himself, while a child, had, in virtue of old family right and proximity of residence, had the run of its aisles and galleries. Can it be, we would ask the physiological philosophers, that a veneration for the edifice of St. Mary Redcliffe, and for all connected with it, had thus come down in the Chatterton blood; that, as it were, the defunct old Chattertons, Johns and Thomases in their series, who had, in times gone by, paced along the interior of the church, jangling its ponderous keys, brushing away its cobwebs, and talking with its stony effigies of knights and saints buried below, had thus acquired, in gradually-increasing mass, a store of antique

associations, to be transmitted, as a fatal heritage, to the unhappy youth in whom their line was to become extinct and immortal? We can suppose that, in part, this was the case.

But Chatterton's disposition towards the antique did not remain a mere fetichistic instinct of veneration for the relic his ancestors had guarded. From his very boyhood he entered with all the zeal of a reader and intelligent inquirer into the service of his hereditary feeling. It would not be long, for example, before, passing from the edifice to its history, as recorded in the annals of Bristol, he would learn to pronounce, with indefinable reverence, the name of its founder, William Canynge, the Bristol merchant of the fifteenth century. Whatever particulars were to be gleaned from books regarding the life of this notable personage, must have been familiar to Chatterton long before he ceased to be a blue-coat scholar. How Canynge had been such a wealthy man, that, according to William of Worcester, he was owner of ten vessels, and gave employment to one hundred mariners, as well as to one hundred artificers on shore; how he had been as munificent as he was wealthy; how he had been mayor of Bristol in 1431, and four separate times afterwards; how he and the town had become involved in the Wars of the Roses, and how, on the accession of Edward IV., he had made the peace of the town by paying a fine to that monarch; and how, finally, he had become a priest in his old age, and devoted a large part of his fortune to the erection, or rather re-construction, of the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe—all this knowledge, easily accessible to an inquiring Bristol boy, Chatterton would collect and ponder.

Chatterton, however, was not merely an inquisitive lad; he was a young poet, full of enthusiasm and constructive talent. Hence, not satisfied with a meagre outline of the story of Canynge, as it could be derived from the chronicles of Bristol, he set himself to fill up the outline by conjectures and synchronisms, so as to make clear for himself "Canynge's Life and Times," as a luminous little spot in the general darkness of the English past. And here comes in the story of the old parchments.



Over the north porch of St. Mary's Redcliffe was a room known as "the muniment-room." Here, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, there lay six or seven locked chests, which were understood to contain old deeds and other writings. One of the chests was traditionally known as "Mr. Canynge's coffer." The keys of this chest had been long lost ; and when, in the year 1727, it was deemed expedient to secure some title-deeds that were believed to be contained in it, a locksmith was employed to break it open. Such documents as were thought of importance were then removed, and the rest were left in the open chest as of no value. The other chests were similarly treated. Accordingly, parcels of the remaining contents were subsequently, from time to time, carried off by various persons ; and, in particular, it was remembered that when John Chatterton was sexton, his brother, the choir-singer and teacher of Pyle-street school, had carried off a quantity of them to be used as book-covers and for other such-like purposes. A bundle of these parchments remained in the possession of Mrs. Chatterton after her husband's death, and such of them as had not been previously snipped into thread-papers came into Chatterton's hands.

What these old documents really contained, we have no means of knowing. That some of them may have been papers of historical value, is not improbable. It is certain, at least, that they interested Chatterton, that the possession of them nourished his sense of the antique, and that he learnt to decipher parts of them, catching out old bits of Latin phrasology, and such like, which he mis-wrote in copying. We may even go farther, and surmise that out of those papers he may have derived hints that were of use to him in his attempt to represent the circumstances of Canynge's life. They may have helped him, for example, to appropriate names for some of those fictitious or semi-fictitious personages whom he thought proper to group around Canynge in that tableau or historical romance of "Bristol in the Fifteenth Century," with the construction of which he regaled himself.

Of these secondary *dramatis personæ*, grouped in his imagination around Canynge, the most important was a supposed priest called Thomas Rowley, or more fully, "Thomas Rowlie, parish-preeste of St. John's, in the city of Bristol." The relations between Canynge and Rowley, as bodied forth in Chatterton's conception, were as follows:—Rowley, who had been at school in Bristol along with Canynge, became chaplain to Canynge's father. On that old gentleman's death, Canynge, then a rising young merchant, continued the family patronage to his schoolmate, and employed him, amongst other things, in collecting manuscripts and drawings for him. About the time of Canynge's first mayoralty, in 1431, Rowley was settled as parish-priest of St. John's; and from that time forward, for a period of thirty or forty years, the two men continued on terms of the most friendly and cordial intimacy—Canynge, the wealthiest man in the west of England, and the civic soul of Bristol, living as a liberal merchant-prince in a noble residence; Rowley, a man of books and literature, in a modest priest's habitation, made comfortable by his patron's munificence. These two men, with a few others of minor activity—as Carpenter, Bishop of Bristol; Sir Tibbot Gorges, a country gentleman of the neighbourhood; Sir Charles Baldwin, a brave knight of the Lancastrian faction; Iscam, another priest of Bristol; Ladgate, a monk of London, &c. &c.—constituted, in fact, an enlightened little club in Chatterton's ideal Bristol of 1430-60, enlivening that city by their amateur theatricals and other relaxations from more severe business, and rendering it more distinguished for culture than any other town in England, excepting Oxford and London. The fine old merchant himself occasionally uses his pen to some purpose, as in his epigram on the imaginary John à Dalbenie, a hot politician of the town—

"John makes a jar 'bout Lancaster and York.  
Be still, good manne, and learn to mind thy work!"

Generally, however, he abstains from literature himself, and prefers reading or hearing the productions of his friends



Iscom and Rowley, especially those of Rowley, who is his poet-laureate.

Had Chatterton put forth this coinage of his brain in the shape of a professed historical romance, all would have been well. But from working so lovingly in the *matter* of antiquity, he contracted also a preference for the antique in *form*. As Scott, in the very process of realizing to himself the Quentin Durwards, the Mause Headriggs, and the Jedediah Cleishbothams of his inimitable fictions, acquired in his own person an antique way of thinking, and a mastery over the antique glossary, if not a positive affection for it, so it became natural to Chatterton, revelling as he did in conceptions of the antique, to draw on, as it were, an ancient-fashioned suit of thought, and make use of antique forms of language. Hence, when, prompted by his literary impulse, he sought to embody in verse any of those traditions or fictions relative to the past time of England which his enthusiasm for the antique had led him to fix upon—as, for example, the story of the Danish invasions of England, the story of the Battle of Hastings, or the story of a tournament in the reign of Edward I.—he found himself obliged by a kind of artistic necessity to impart a quaintness to his style by the use of old vocables and idioms. Persisted in thereafter for the mere pleasure of the exercise, the habit would become exaggerated, till at last it would amount to an ungovernable disposition to riot in the obsolete.

Even so far, however, there was nothing blameworthy. In thus selecting a style artificially antique for the conveyance of his historic fancies, Chatterton, it might be affirmed, had but obeyed the proper instinct of his genius, and chosen that element in which he found he could work best. Every man has his mode, or set of intellectual conditions most favourable for the production and development of what is best in him; and in Chatterton's case this mode, this set of conditions, consisted in an affectation of the antique. For let any one compare the Rowley Poems of Chatterton with his own acknowledged productions, and the conclusion will be inevitable, that his *forte* was the antique, and that here alone lay

any preternatural power he possessed. There are, indeed, in his acknowledged poems, felicities of expression and gleams of genius, showing that even as a modern poet he would certainly in time have taken a high rank ; but to do justice to his astonishing abilities, we must read his antique compositions. In the element of the antique Chatterton rules like a master ; in his modern effusions he is but a clever boy beginning to handle with some effect the language of Pope and Dryden. Moreover, there is a perceptible moral difference between the two classes of his performances. In his antique poems there is freshness, enthusiasm, and a fine earnest sense of the becoming ; throughout the modern ones we are offended by irreverence, malevolence, and a kind of vicious, boyish pruriency. And conscious as Chatterton must have been of this difference ; aware as he must have been that it was when he wrote in his artificially-antique style that his invention worked most powerfully, that his heart beat most nobly, and the poetic shiver ran most keenly through his veins—we cannot wonder that he should have given himself up to this kind of literary recreation rather than to any other.

Unfortunately, however, meaner causes were all this while at work — maliciousness towards individuals, craving for notoriety, delight in misleading people, and, above all, want of money. Moreover, for this unhappy combination of moral states and dispositions, it so happened that the Grandfather of Lies had a very suitable temptation ready, in the shape of that most successful literary imposture, the Ossian Poems, then in the first blush of their contested celebrity. Yielding to the temptation, Chatterton resolved to turn what was best and most original in his genius—his enthusiasm for the antique—into the service of his worst propensities. In other words, he resolved to adopt, with certain variations and adaptations to his own case, the trick of Macpherson. That this was the act of one express and distinct determination of his will—a solemn and secret compact with himself, made at a very early period indeed, probably before the conclusion of his fifteenth year—there can be no manner of doubt. The

elaboration of his scheme of imposture, however, was gradual. The first exhibition of it, and probably that which suggested much that followed, was the Burgum Hoax, with its after-thought of the old English poet, John de Bergham. Of this original trick the Rowley device was but a gigantic expansion. To invent a poet of the past, on whom to father all his own compositions in the antique style, and to give this poet a probable and fixed footing in history, was the essential form of the scheme. That the poet thus invented should be a native of Bristol, and that his date should be in the times of the merchant Canynge, were special accidents determined by Chatterton's position and peculiar capabilities. And thus the two processes of invention, the legitimate and the illegitimate, worked into each other's hands,—Chatterton's previous conceptions of the life and times of Canynge providing him with a proper chronological and topographical environment for his required poet; and his device of the poet giving richness and interest to his romance of Canynge. And, once begun, there were powerful reasons why the deceit should be persevered in—the pleasure of the jest itself; the secret sense of superiority it gave him; its advantage as a means of hooking half-crowns out of people's pockets; and last, though not least, the impossibility of retracting, without being knocked down by Barrett for damaging his history, or kicked by the Catcotts for having made fools of them. Hence, by little and little, the whole organization of the imposture, from the first rumour of old manuscripts up to the use of ochre, black lead, and smoke, in preparing specimens of them.

But Chatterton, as we have already hinted, was not a literary monomaniac, a creature of one faculty. His enthusiasm for the antique, although the most remarkable part of him, was not the whole of him. The Rowley habit of thought and expression, though he liked to put it on, was also a thing that he could at pleasure throw off. Though an antiquarian, and a midnight reader of Speght's Chaucer and other black-letter volumes, he was also an attorney's apprentice, accustomed to small flirtations; accustomed to debate and have brawls with other attorney's apprentices, to read the newspapers and

magazines, to be present at street mobs and public meetings, and in every other way to take an apprentice's interest in the current ongoings of the day. In short, besides being an antiquarian, and a great creative genius in the element of the English antique, Chatterton was also, in the year 1769-70, a complete and very characteristic specimen of that long-extinct phenomenon, a thinking young Englishman of the early part of the reign of George III. In other words, reader, besides being, by the special charter of his genius, a poet in the Rowley vein, he was also, by the more general right of his life eighty years ago, very much such a young fellow as your own unmarried great-grandfather was.

And what was that? Why, reader, your unmarried great-grandfather, besides wearing a wig (which Chatterton did not), a coat with broad lapels and flaps, knee-breeches, buckles, and a cocked hat, was also, ten to one, a wild young dog of a free-thinker, fond of Churchill and Wilkes's "Essay on Woman," addicted to horrible slang against Bute and the whole Scottish nation, and raving mad about a thing he called Liberty. He read and repeated Junius, made jokes against parsons, and (only until he married, remember) talked Deism and very improper moral doctrine with respect to the sexes. Now Chatterton, up to his capacities as a youth of seventeen, was all this. He repudiated orthodoxy, refused to be called a Christian, and held the whole clerical profession in unbounded contempt. He drew up articles of faith on a slip of paper (still to be seen in the British Museum) which he carried in his pocket; which articles of faith were very much what Pope believed before him, and what Burns, Byron, and others have believed since. In short, he was recognised in Bristol circles as an avowed free-thinker; and his politics were to correspond. He sneered at Samuel Johnson, and thought him an old Tory bigot, who had got a pension for political partizanship; he delighted in the scandal about Bute and the King's mother; he thought the King himself an obstinate dolt; he denounced Grafton and the ministry to small Bristol audiences; and he desired the nation to rally round Wilkes.

One remark more, and we end our *Interleaf*. As Chatterton



was this dual phenomenon that we have described, as he was composed of two parts—a mania for the antique, and that general assemblage of more ordinary qualities and prejudices which constituted the able young Englishman of his era; so, it appears to us, the latter part of his character began, about his seventeenth year, to gain upon him. Abandoning the antique vein, wherein he had, as it were, a native gift ready fashioned from the first, and all but independent of culture, he began to court his more general faculties of thought and observation, and to give himself more willingly up to that species of literature in which, equally with other able young men, he could only hope to attain ease and perfection by the ordinary processes of assiduity and culture. Had he lived, we believe there was an amount of general vigour and acquisition in him that would have secured him eminence even in this field, and have made him one of the conspicuous writers of the eighteenth century; but dying as he did so early, the only bequest of real value he has left to the world is that more specific and unaccountable deposit of his genius, the Rowley antiques.

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To a provincial attorney's apprentice, full of literary aspirations, disgusted with his position in life, yet with no immediate prospect of a better, there was but one outlook of any reasonable hope or promise—the chance of being able, in the meantime, to form some connexion with London periodicals or publishers. Accordingly, this was the scheme which Chatterton, whose highest printed venture hitherto had been in the columns of *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, set himself to realize.

His first attempt was upon Dodsley, the publisher, of Pall Mall, the brother and successor in business of the more celebrated Robert Dodsley, the author of the "Muse in Livery," and other trifles of some note in their day, and the projector, along with Burke, of the *Annual Register*. The Dodsleys, it should be mentioned, had published a standard collection of ancient and modern English poetry, to which, it was understood, additions would be made in subsequent volumes. This

fact; the notoriety of the *Annual Register*, then in the tenth year of its existence; probably, also, the circumstance, not likely to be overlooked by a young *littérateur*, that in that periodical there was a department for literary contributions and poetry—all pointed Dodsley out to Chatterton as a likely person for his purpose. Accordingly, one morning towards the Christmas of 1768, the worthy publisher, entering his shop in Pall-Mall, finds among his letters one from Bristol, addressed in a neat small hand, and worded as follows:—

“Bristol, December 21st, 1768.

“SIR,—I take this method to acquaint you that I can procure copies of several ancient poems, and an interlude, perhaps the oldest dramatic piece extant, wrote by one Rowley, a priest of Bristol, who lived in the reigns of Henry VI. and Edward IV. If these pieces will be of service to you, at your command copies shall be sent to you by your most obedient servant,

“D. B.

“Please to direct to D. B., to be left with Mr. Thomas Chatterton, Redcliffe Hill, Bristol.”

In reply to this, Dodsley probably sent an intimation to the effect that he would be glad to see the poems in question, particularly the interlude; for the following letter, turned up long afterwards, along with the foregoing, among the loose papers in Dodsley's counting-house, looks as if Chatterton had at least received a reply to his note:—

“Bristol, Feb. 15, 1769.

“SIR,—Having intelligence that the tragedy of *Ælla* was in being, after a long and laborious search I was so happy as to attain a sight of it. I endeavoured to obtain a copy of it to send you; but the present possessor absolutely denies to give me one, unless I give him one guinea for a consideration. As I am unable to procure such a sum, I made a search for another copy, but unsuccessfully. Unwilling such a beauteous piece should be lost, I have made bold to apply to you. Several gentlemen of learning who have seen it join with me in praising it. I am far from having any mercenary views for myself in the affair; and, was I able, would print it at my own risk. It is a perfect tragedy—the plot clear; the language spirited; and the songs (interspersed in it) flowing, poetical, and elegantly simple; the similes judiciously applied, and, though wrote in the age of Henry VI., not inferior to many of the present age. If I can procure a copy, with or without the gratification, it shall be immediately sent to you. The motive that actuates me to do this, is to convince the world that the monks (of whom some have so despicable an opinion) were not such blockheads as generally thought, and that good poetry might be wrote in the dark days of superstition, as well as in these more enlightened ages. An immediate answer will oblige. I shall not receive your favour as for myself, but as your agent. I am, sir, your most obedient servant,

“THOMAS CHATTERTON.

“P. S.—My reason for concealing my name was, lest my master (who is now out of town) should see my letters, and think I neglected his business. Direct for me on Redcliffe Hill.



[Here followed an extract from the tragedy, as a specimen of its style.]

"The whole contains about one thousand lines. If it should not suit you, I should be obliged to you if you would calculate the expenses of printing it, as I will endeavour to publish it by subscription on my own account.

"To Mr James Dodsley, Bookseller, Pall Mall, London."

This clumsy attempt to extract a guinea from the publisher (Chatterton had probably just finished his own manuscript of *Ælla*, and did not like the notion of copying out so long a poem on mere chance) very naturally failed. Mr. Dodsley did not think the speculation worth risking a guinea on; and "*Ælla, a Tragycal Enterlude, or Discoorseynge Tragedie, wrotten by Thomas Rowllie; plaiedd before Mastre Canynge, atte hys Howse, nempte the Rodde Lodge,*" remained useless among Chatterton's papers.

Chatterton was not daunted. Among the notabilities of the time with whose names his own excursions in the field of literature necessarily made him acquainted, there was one towards whom, for many reasons, he felt specially attracted—the ingenious Horace Walpole, then an elderly gentleman of fifty-two, leading his life of luxurious gossip and literary ease, between his town house in Arlington-street, Piccadilly, and his country seat at Strawberry Hill, Twickenham. Known in the world of letters by his *Castle of Otranto*, his tragedy of *The Mysterious Mother*, his *Catalogue of Royal and Noble Authors*, and other various productions, Walpole was at that time busy in collecting additional materials for his *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, the publication of which he had begun in 1761. It is on this circumstance that Chatterton fastens. One evening in March, 1769, Mr. Walpole, sitting, we will suppose, by his library fire in Arlington-street, has a packet brought him by his bookseller, Mr. Bathoe, of the Strand (the first man, by-the-bye, that kept a circulating library in London). Opening the packet, he finds, first of all, the following note: -

"SIR, -Being versed a little in antiquities, I have met with several curious manuscripts, among which the following may be of service to you in any future edition of your truly entertaining *Anecdotes of Painting*. In correcting the mistakes, if any in the notes, you will greatly oblige your most humble servant,

"THOMAS CHATTERTON.

"Bristol, March 25; Corn-street,"

Appended to this short note were several pages of antique writing, entitled, “*The Ryse of Peyncteyne in Englande, wroten by T. Rowlie, 1469, for Mastre Canynge,*” and commencing as follows:—“Peynctyng ynn England haveth of ould tyme bin yn use; for, saieth the Roman wryters, the Brytonnes dyd depycte themselves, yn soundrie wyse, of the fourmes of the sonne and moone wyth the heerbe woade: albeytte I doubte theie were no skylled carvellers.” After which introduction, the document went on to give biographical notices of certain distinguished painters that flourished in England during Saxon times and in the early Norman reigns. Attached to the document, were explanatory notes in Chatterton’s own name. One of these notes informed Walpole who Rowley, the reputed author of the MS., was:—“His merit as a biographer and historiographer is great; as a poet still greater: some of his pieces would do honour to Pope; and the person under whose patronage they may appear to the world will lay the Englishman, the antiquary, and the poet, under eternal obligation.” Another note performed the like biographical office for Canynge, that “*Mæcenās of his time;*” and a third conveyed the information that one John, the second Abbot of Saint Austin’s, in Bristol, mentioned in the text as “the fyrste Englyshe paynstere in oyles,” was also the greatest poet of his age (A.D. 1186), and gave, as a specimen of his poetry, three stanzas on Richard I. Finally, Chatterton offered to put Walpole in possession of still other particulars from the same source.

Whether from the suddenness and *naïveté* of the attack, or from the stupefying effects of the warm air of his library on a March evening, Walpole was completely taken in. He can hardly have glanced over the whole letter, when, really interested by its contents, he takes his pen and writes the following reply:—

“Arlington-st., March 28, 1769.

“SIR,—I cannot but think myself singularly obliged by a gentleman with whom I have not the pleasure of being acquainted, when I read your very curious and kind letter, which I have this minute received. I give you a thousand thanks for it, and for the very obliging offer you make of communicating your manuscript to me. What you have already sent me is valuable, and full of information; but, instead of correcting you, Sir, you are far more

able to correct me. I have not the happiness of understanding the Saxon language, and, without your learned notes, should not have been able to comprehend Rowley's text.

"As a second edition of my *Anecdotes* was published last year, I must not flatter myself that a third will be wanted soon, but I shall be happy to lay up any notices you will be so good as to extract for me, and send me at your leisure. for, as it is uncertain when I may use them, I would by no means borrow or detain your MSS.

"Give me leave to ask you where Rowley's poems are to be found. I should not be sorry to print them, or at least a specimen of them, if they have never been printed.

"The Abbot John's verses that you have given me are wonderful for their harmony and spirit, though there are some words that I do not understand. You do not point out exactly the time when he lived, which I wish to know, as I suppose it was long before John al Ectry's discovery of oil-painting; if so, it confirms what I have guessed, and hinted in my *Anecdotes*, that oil-painting was known here much earlier than that discovery or revival.

"I will not trouble you with more questions now, Sir, but flatter myself, from the urbanity and politeness you have already shown me, that you will give me leave to consult you. I hope, too, you will forgive the simplicity of my direction, as you have favoured me with none other.—I am, Sir, your much obliged and obedient humble servant,

"HORACE WALPOLE.

"P.S.—Be so good as to direct to Mr. Walpole, Arlington Street."

Chatterton was highly elated. He had received a letter from the great Horace Walpole, written as from an equal to an equal! How differently men of that stamp treat one from the Catcotts, the Barretts, and other local low-born persons! In haste to acknowledge such politeness, he sends off a supplementary "*Historie of Peyncters yn England, bie T. Rowlie*;" containing also sketches of two new poets—Ecca, a Saxon bishop of the year 557, and Elman, a Saxon bishop of the same epoch—with specimens of their verses, translated from the original Saxon by Rowley. He adds some more verses of the Abbot John's, and promises a complete transcript of Rowley's works as soon as he shall have had time to make one. At the same time he gives Walpole a confidential account of himself and his prospects. This part of the letter is lost; but Walpole thus states his recollection of its tenor:—

"He informed me that he was the son of a poor widow, who supported him with great difficulty; that he was a clerk or apprentice to an attorney, but had a taste and turn for more elegant studies; and hinted a wish that I would assist him with my interest in emerging out of so dull a profession, by procuring him some place in which he could pursue his natural bent."

Clearly Chatterton was never so near telling the whole truth as when, touched by Walpole's politeness, he thus addressed him as his only available friend. One is sorry that

he did not try the effect of a full confession. Had Walpole received a letter from his unknown correspondent, conveying in addition to the foregoing particulars, this farther acknowledgment, that what he (Chatterton) had sent to him (Walpole) was not a real extract from a MS., but a forgery; that, for more than a year, he had been palming off similar forgeries on various persons in Bristol; but that now he was heartily tired of the cheat, and would fain be out of it; and that if he (Walpole), with such specimens before him of his (Chatterton's) powers as these pretended antiques afforded, should be disposed to add the kindness of his practical assistance to that of his forgiveness for the trick attempted on him, he would thereby earn the writer's lasting gratitude, and save a life not wholly irretrievable—one wonders greatly what, in such circumstances, Horace Walpole would have done! Would the reflection in the library in Arlington-street have been, "The impudent young scoundrel! I will write to his master," or "Poor young fellow! he throws himself upon me, and I must do something for him."

Unfortunately, Chatterton did not put it in Walpole's option whether he would be thus generous. He left the virtuoso to discover the fact of the imposture for himself. Nor was it difficult to do so. On the very second reading of the communication, to which, in a moment of credulity, he had returned so polite a reply, Walpole, sufficiently alive, one would think, to the possibility of a literary trick—his own *Castle of Otranto* had been published as a pretended translation from a black-letter book printed at Naples in 1529; and he had but recently been implicated in the Ossian business—must have begun to suspect that all was not right. A series of Anglo-Saxon painters till then unheard of; a new poet of the twelfth century writing a poem on Richard I. in perfectly modern metre; and a new poet of the fifteenth, advertised as having left numerous poems and other writings still extant in Bristol—all this in one letter was too much to swallow; and little wonder if, as he afterwards said, his reflection was that "somebody having met his 'Anecdotes on Painting' had a mind to laugh at him." But when the second letter came, bringing



with it a batch of new painters, and specimens of two Saxon poets of the sixth century ; and when, in this letter, the writer explained his circumstances, and that he was a poor widow's son with a turn for literature—there could be no longer any doubt about the matter. His friends, Gray and Mason, to whom he showed the documents, concurred with him in thinking them forgeries, and “recommended the returning them without farther notice.” But Walpole, with an amount of good-nature for which he does not get credit, did not act so summarily. He took the trouble, he says, to write to a relation of his, an old lady residing at Bath, desiring her to make inquiries about Chatterton. The reply was a confirmation of Chatterton's story about himself, but “nothing was returned about his character.” In these circumstances, Walpole discharges the whole matter from his mind thus :—

“Being satisfied with my intelligence about Chatterton, I wrote him a letter with as much kindness and tenderness as if I had been his guardian ; for though I had no doubt of his impositions, such a spirit of poetry breathed in his coinage as interested me for him ; nor was it a grave crime in a young bard to have forged false notes of hand that were to pass current only in the parish of Parnassus. I undeceived him about my being a person of any interest, and urged to him that, in duty and gratitude to his mother, who had straitened herself to breed him up to a profession, he ought to labour in it, that in her old age he might absolve his filial debt, and I told that, when he should have made his fortune, he might unbend himself with the studies consonant to his inclinations. I told him also that I had communicated his transcripts to much better judges, and that they were by no means satisfied with the authenticity of his supposed MSS.”

In fancying the impatient “Bah, old gentleman! don't I know all that myself?” with which the disappointed boy, reading this letter, must have received its advice, the question is apt to recur to us, how it is that, with such evidence of the uselessness of advice before their eyes, people are so stupid as to persist in giving it. But the remark of an eminent living statistician comes into our mind. “Advice,” said he, “probably saves a percentage.” And certainly this puts the matter on its right basis.

Chatterton sent two letters in reply to that of Walpole. In the first, the tone of which is somewhat downcast, he professes himself unable to dispute with a person of such literary distinction, respecting the age of a MS. ; thanks him for his

advice, and expresses his resolution to follow it." "Though I am but sixteen years," he says, "I have lived long enough to see that poverty attends literature." The second letter, which is dated April 14th, is more abrupt. Here he expresses his conviction that the papers of Rowley are genuine, and requests Walpole, unless he should be inclined to publish the transcripts, to return them, as he wished to give them to "Mr. Barrett, an able antiquary, now writing the history of Bristol," and had no other copy.

When this second note reached Arlington-street, Walpole was on the eve of a journey to Paris; and, in the hurry, the request to return the MSS. was not attended to. Again Chatterton wrote; but, as the virtuoso was absent, he received no answer. It was not till after six weeks that Walpole returned to London; and then so insignificant a matter was not likely to be remembered. Towards the close of July, however, and when he had been again in town five or six weeks, he was reminded of his Bristol correspondent, by the receipt of what he thought "a singularly impertinent note:"—

"SIR,—I cannot reconcile your behaviour to me with the notions I once entertained of you. I think myself injured, Sir; and did you not know my circumstances, you would not dare to treat me thus. I have sent twice for a copy of the MSS.; no answer from you. An explanation or excuse for your silence would oblige

"THOMAS CHATTERTON.

"July 24."

Walpole's conduct, on the receipt of this note, we will let himself relate:—

"My heart did not accuse me of insolence to him. I wrote an answer, expostulating with him on his injustice, and renewing good advice; but upon second thoughts, reflecting that so wrong-headed a young man, of whom I knew nothing, and whom I had never seen, might be absurd enough to print my letter, I flung it into the fire; and, snapping up both his poems and letters, without taking a copy of either (for which I am now sorry), I returned both to him, and thought no more of him or them."

And thus ended the correspondence between Walpole and Chatterton—Walpole soon forgetting the whole affair, and Chatterton persisting in his belief that, had he not committed the blunder of letting his aristocratic correspondent know that he was "a poor widow's son," he would have fared better at his hands. No doubt there was something in this. But of



all the unreasonable things ever done by a misjudging public, certainly that of condemning Walpole to infamy for his conduct in this affair, and charging on him all the tragic sequel of Chatterton's life, is one of the most unreasonable. Why, the probability is that Walpole behaved better than most people would have done under the circumstances. Let any one in the present day fancy how *he* would act if some one utterly unknown to him were to try to impose on him, in a similar way, through the Post-office. Would the mere cleverness of the cheat take away the instinctive frown of resentment, and change it into admiring enthusiasm? That there may possibly have been in London at that time persons of rare goodness, of overflowing tolerance and compassion, that would have acted differently from the virtuoso of Arlington-street — persons who, saying to themselves, "Here is a poor young man of abilities, in a bad way," would have immediately called for their carpet-bags, and set off for Bristol by coach, to dig out the culprit, and lecture him soundly, and make a man of him—we will not deny. We fear, however, that if that time was like the present, such men must have been very thinly scattered, and very hard to find. Looking back now on the whole series of circumstances, we must, of course, feel that it was a pity the correspondence did not lead to a better issue; and Walpole himself lived to know this. But as Burke has said, "Men are wise with little reflection, and good with little self-denial, in the business of all times except their own." Let, therefore, such as are disposed to blame Walpole in this affair lay the whole story to heart in the form of a maxim for their own guidance.

While the correspondence with Walpole had been going on, Chatterton had not been idle. In the month of January, 1769, there appeared in London the first number of a new periodical called the *Town and Country Magazine*, a periodical somewhat on the model of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and those other curious monthly collections of scraps, with which, eighty years ago, our ancestors, strangers to the more elaborate entertainment of modern periodicals, used to regale their full-fed leisure. Here was an opportunity for the young *littérateur* of Bristol.

Accordingly, in the February number (magazines were then published retrospectively, *i.e.*, at the close of the month whose name they bore), there appeared two contributions from the pen of Chatterton: the one a prose account of the costume of Saxon heralds, signed "D. B.;" the other, a little complimentary poem addressed to "Mr. Alcock, the miniature-painter of Bristol," and signed "Asaphides." Under these signatures he continued to contribute to the magazine; and effusions of his, chiefly Ossianic prose-poems, purporting to be from the Saxon or ancient British, appeared in all the subsequent numbers for the year 1769, except those of June, September, and October. In the number for May appeared one of the finest of his minor Rowley poems. In short, at the publishing office of the *Town and Country*, in London, the handwriting of "D. B.," of Bristol, must have been recognised, in 1769, as that of one of the established correspondents of the magazine; and in Bristol it must have been a fact known and enviously commented on among the Carys, the Smiths, the Kators, and other young men of Chatterton's acquaintance, that he could have his pieces printed as often as he liked in a London periodical. Chatterton felt the immensity of the honour; and there is extant a somewhat unveracious letter of his to a distant relative, "a breeches-maker in Salisbury," in which he brags of it. He tells the breeches-maker, at the same time, of his correspondence with Walpole. "It ended," he says, "as most such do. I differed from him in the age of a MS.; he insists upon his superior talents, which is no proof of that superiority. We possibly may engage publicly in some one of the periodical publications, though I know not who will give the onset."

The *Town and Country Magazine* seems to have been the only metropolitan print to which Chatterton was a contributor during the year 1769. But in the beginning of 1770, he succeeded in another venture, and became the correspondent also of a London newspaper.

The newspapers of that day were by no means such as we now see. The largest of them consisted of but a single sheet, corresponding in size with our small evening papers. Their

contents, too, were neither so various nor so elaborately prepared as those of our present newspapers. Advertisements, paragraphs of political gossip picked up outside the Houses of Parliament, and scraps of miscellaneous town, country, and foreign news, constituted nearly all that the newspaper then offered to its readers. What we now call "leading articles," were things hardly known. It was enough for even a metropolitan journal to have one editorial hand to assist the publisher; and the notion of employing a staff of educated men to write comments on the proceedings of the day, was but in its infancy. The place, however, of leading articles by paid *attachés* of the newspaper was in part supplied by the voluntary letters of numerous anonymous correspondents interested in politics, and glad to see their lucubrations in print. Men of political note sometimes took this mode of serving the ends of their party; but the majority of the correspondents of newspapers were literary clients of official men, or private individuals scattered up and down the country. Chief of these unpaid journalists, king among the numberless Brutuses, Publicolas, and Catos, that told the nation its grievances through the columns of the newspapers, was the terrible Junius of the *Public Advertiser*. The boldest of his letters was perhaps that containing his "Address to the king," which was published on the 19th of December, 1769. The excitement that followed this letter, and above all the report that the publisher, Mr. H. J. Woodfall, was to be brought to account for it before the public tribunals, produced a crisis—some called it a panic, some a jubilee—in the newspaper world.

The other newspapers were, of course, anxious to obtain a share of the *éclat* which the threatened prosecution conferred on the *Public Advertiser*. Accordingly, to re-assure its correspondents, and to convince its subscribers of its unflinching liberalism in the midst of danger, the *Middlesex Journal*, a bi-weekly newspaper of the day, not far behind the *Advertiser* in credit, hastened to put forth the following manifesto:—

"William George Edmonds, of Shoe Lane, in the parish of St. Andrew's, Holborn, Gent., maketh oath and saith, that he will not at any time declare the name of any person or persons who shall send any papers to the *Middlesex Journal*, or *Chronicle of Liberty*, or any other publication in which he shall be

concerned, without the express consent and direction of the author of such paper; and that he will not make any discovery by which any of his authors can be found out; and that he will give to the public, in the fairest and fullest manner, all such essays, dissertations, and other writings, without any alteration, so far as he can or ought, consistently with the duty of an honest man, a good member of society, a friend to his country, and a loyal subject.—W. G. EDMUNDS.

“Sworn at the Mansion House, London, January 1st, 1770, before me,  
“W. BECKFORD, Mayor.”

“N.B.—Mr. E. makes it a general rule to destroy all MSS. as soon as they are composed for the press. If any gentleman, however, is desirous of having his MSS. returned to him, Mr. E. begs that the words ‘to be returned,’ may be in large letters at the end of the originals. In that case they shall be preserved and delivered up to any person who shall bring an order for that purpose in the same handwriting as the original.”

This manifesto of Mr. Edmunds, copied by us from the *Middlesex Journal* for February 6th, 1770, and which was repeated in succeeding numbers, probably caught Chatterton’s eye in Bristol, and determined his already cherished intention of trying his hand at a newspaper article. Accordingly, he plunges at once *in medias res*. There had just been a change of ministry. The Duke of Grafton, the favourite victim of Junius, had resigned, and given place, for some secret Court reason, to the goggle-eyed Lord North. Chatterton, hearing much talk about this affair, thinks it a good topic for his purpose, and, stealing a forenoon from his office-work, pens, in a style mimicked after that of Junius, a “letter to the Duke of G——n,” in which he informs that illustrious personage that his resignation has “caused more speculation than any harlequinade he has already acted;” and tells him that as he had been all along the tool of Bute, to whom he was at first recommended by his “happy vacuity of invention,” so now it is Bute’s influence that has dismissed him. This missive he dates “Bristol, February 16,” and signs “Decimus.” Mr. Edmunds, receiving it in his sanctum in Shoe Lane, glances over it, thinks it tolerably smart, and prints it. Whether the Duke of Grafton ever saw it, poor fellow, we do not know. If he did, “One wasp more” would be his very natural reflection; and he would go on sipping his chocolate.

Chatterton’s next contribution to the *Middlesex Journal*, or at least the next that Mr. Edmunds thought proper to print, was one with the same signature, dated “Bristol, April 10,



1770," and addressed to that much-abused lady, the Princess Dowager of Wales, the mother, and, as people said, manager of the king. Here is a specimen—Junius, it will be observed, to the very cadence:—

"By you men of no principles were thrust into offices they did not know how to discharge, and honoured with trusts they accepted only to violate; being made more conspicuously mean by communicating error and often vice to the character of the person who promoted them. None but a sovereign power can make little villains dangerous, the nobly vicious, the daringly ambitious, only rise from themselves. Without the influence of ministerial authority, Mansfield had been a pettifogging attorney, and Warburton a bustling country curate. The first had not lived to bury the substance of our laws in the shadows of his explanations, nor would the latter have confounded religion with deism, and proved of no use to either. . . . The state of affairs very much resembles the eve of the troubles of Charles I. Unhappy monarch, thou hast a claim, a dear-bought claim, to our pity; nothing but thy death could purchase it. Hadst thou died quietly and in peace, thou hadst died infamous; thy misfortunes were the only happy means of saving thee from the book of shame. What a parallel could the freedom of an English pen strike out!"

This letter was written on a Tuesday. On the Saturday, or, more probably, on the Monday following, a tremendous *dénouement* took place.

Chatterton, among his other eccentricities, had often been heard to talk familiarly of suicide. One evening, for example, pulling out a pistol in the presence of some of his companions, he had placed it to his forehead, saying, "Now, if one had but courage to draw the trigger!" Nor was this mere juvenile affectation. Hateful from the first, Chatterton's position in Bristol had by this time become unendurable to him. All his literary honours, as contributor to a London magazine and correspondent of a London newspaper, were as nothing when put in the balance against his present servitude. If there were seasons when, sanguine in his hopes of a better future, he was able to keep his disgust within bounds, there were others where it rose to a perfect frenzy.

Such a season seems to have been the week in which the foregoing letter was written for the *Middlesex Journal*. From some circumstance or other Chatterton was that week reduced to the necessity of asking Burgum for a loan of money; which Burgum, at the last moment, refused. Chatterton has thus perpetuated the fact:—

"When wildly squandering everything I got,  
On books and learning, and the Lord knows what;

Could Burgum then—my critic, patron, friend—  
Without security, attempt to lend?  
No, that would be imprudent in the man:  
Accuse him of imprudence if you can!"

This disappointment throws him into a state of humour bordering on the suicidal; and, being left alone in his master's office on the Saturday forenoon following, he displays it by penning a kind of satirical will or suicide's farewell to the world. This extraordinary document, which is still extant, is headed thus: "All this wrote between 11 and 2 o'clock, Saturday, in the utmost distress of mind, April 14, 1770;" and, after some fifty lines of verse addressed to Burgum, the Rev. Mr. Catcott, and Barrett, it proceeds as follows:—

"This is the last will and testament of me, Thomas Chatterton, of the city of Bristol; being sound in body, or it is the fault of my last surgeon: the soundness of my mind the coroner and jury are to be judges of—desiring them to take notice that the most perfect masters of human nature in Bristol distinguish me by the title of 'the mad genius;' therefore, if I do a mad action, it is conformable to every action of my life, which all savoured of insanity.

"*Item.*—If, after my death, which will happen to-morrow night before eight o'clock, being the Feast of the Resurrection, the coroner and jury bring it in lunacy, I will and direct that Paul Farr, Esq., and Mr. John Flower, at their joint expense, cause my body to be interred in the tomb of my fathers, and raise the monument over my body to the height of four feet five inches, placing the present flat stone on the top, and adding six tablets.

["Here follow directions for certain engravings to be placed on the six tablets viz., on two of them, fronting each other, certain heraldic achievements; on another, an inscription, in old English characters, to his ancestor, Guatevine Chatterton, A.D. 1210; on another, an inscription, in the same character, to another ancestor, Alanus Chatterton, A.D. 1415; on another, an inscription, in Roman letters, to the memory of his father; and on the remaining one, this epitaph to himself:—

"TO THE MEMORY OF  
"THOMAS CHATTERTON.

"Reader, judge not. If thou art a Christian, believe that he shall be judged by a supreme power: to that power alone is he now answerable."]

"And I will and direct that if the coroner's inquest bring it in *felo-de-se*, the said monument shall be, notwithstanding, erected. And if the said Paul Farr and John Flower have souls so Bristolish as to refuse this my request, they will transmit a copy of my will to the Society for supporting the Bill of Rights, whom I hereby empower to build the said monument according to the afore-said directions. And if they, the said Paul Farr and John Flower, should build the said monument, I will and direct that the second edition of my *Kew Gardens* shall be dedicated to them in the following dedication:—'To Paul Parr and John Flower, Esqrs., this book is most humbly dedicated by the author's ghost.'

"*Item.*—I give all my vigour and fire of youth to Mr. George Catcott, being sensible he is most in want of it.

"*Item.*—From the same charitable motive, I give and bequeath unto the Rev. Mr. Camplin, sen., all my humility. To Mr. Burgum all my prosody and grammar, likewise one moiety of my modesty; the other moiety to any young



lady who can prove, without blushing, that she wants that valuable commodity. To Bristol all my spirit and disinterestedness, parcels of goods unknown on her quay since the days of Canning and Rowley (Tis true, a charitable gentleman, one Mr Colston, smuggled a considerable quantity of it; but, it being proved that he was a Papist, the worshipful society of aldermen endeavoured to throttle him with the oath of allegiance). I leave also my religion to Dr Cutts Barton, Dean of Bristol, hereby empowering the sub-sacrist to strike him on the head when he goes to sleep in church. My powers of utterance I give to the Rev. Mr Broughton, hoping he will employ them to a better purpose than reading lectures on the immortality of the soul. I leave the Rev. Mr. Catcott some little of my free thinking, that he may put on spectacles of reason, and see how wilely he is duped in believing the Scriptures literally. (I wish he and his brother George would know how far I am their real enemy; but I have an unlucky way of raillery, and when the strong fit of satire is upon me, I spare neither friend nor foe. This is my excuse for what I have said of them elsewhere). I leave Mr Clayfield the sincerest thanks my gratitude can give; and I will and direct that whatever any person may think the pleasure of reading my works worth, they immediately pay their own valuation to him, since it is then become a lawful debt to me, and to him as my executor in this case.

"I leave my moderation to the politicians on both sides of the question. I leave my generosity to our present right worshipful mayor, Thomas Harris, Esq. I give my abstinence to the company at the Sheriff's annual feast in general, more particularly the aldermen.

"*Item.*—I give and bequeath to Mr Matthew Mease a mourning ring with this motto, 'Alas, poor Chatterton!' provided he pays for it himself. *Item.*—I leave the young ladies all the letters they have had from me, assuring them that they need be under no apprehensions from the appearance of my ghost, for I die for none of them. *Item.*—I leave all my debts, the whole not five pounds, to the payment of the charitable and generous Chamber of Bristol, on penalty, if refused, to hinder every member from a good dinner by appearing in the form of a bailiff. If, in defiance of this terrible spectre, they obstinately persist in refusing to discharge my debts, let my two creditors apply to the supporters of the Bil. of Rights. *Item.*—I leave my mother and sister to the protection of my friends, if I have any

"Executed in the presence of Omniscience, this 14th of April, 1770.

"THOMAS CHATTERTON."

Whether this dreadful document got immediately abroad among Chatterton's friends, does not appear; another document, however, written at the same time and in the same mad mood, was sufficiently alarming to produce a catastrophe. The Mr. Clayfield mentioned with such peculiar respect in the preceding paper, a distiller, of means and respectability, and a friend of Mr. Lambert's, seems to have been a person of more than usual consideration in the eyes of Mr. Lambert's apprentice. To him, accordingly, rather than to any other person in Bristol, he chose to indite a letter conveying his rash intention of suicide. This letter—not actually sent to Mr. Clayfield by Chatterton, but inadvertently left about, it would appear, with that gentleman's address upon it—was prematurely delivered to him. Startled by its contents, he lost

no time in communicating them to Mr. Lambert. There was an immediate consultation among Chatterton's friends, and Mr. Barrett undertook to see the insane lad, and reason with him on the folly and criminality of his conduct. Accordingly, a long conversation took place between them, in which, to use his own words, he took Chatterton to task for the "bad company and principles he had adopted," and lectured him seriously "on the horrible crime of self-murder, however glossed over by present libertines." Chatterton was affected, and shed tears. The next day, however, he sent Mr. Barrett the following letter, the original of which may be seen in the British Museum:—

"SIR,—Upon recollection I don't know how Mr. Clayfield could come by his letter, as I intended to give him a letter, but did not. In regard to my motives for the supposed rashness, I shall observe that I keep no worse company than *myself*: I never drink to excess, and have, without vanity, too much sense to be attached to the mercenary retailers of iniquity. No, it is my PRIDE, my damn'd native unconquerable PRIDE, that plunges me into distraction. You must know that nineteen-twentieths of my composition is pride. I must either live a slave, a servant, to have no will of my own, which I may freely declare as such, or DIE. Perplexing alternative! but it distracts me to think of it! I will endeavour to learn humility, but it cannot be here. What it may cost me in the trial, Heaven knows.

"I am your much obliged unhappy humble servant,

"T. C.

"Thursday Evening."

Before this letter had been written by Chatterton, one thing had been fully determined with regard to him. Mr. Lambert was no longer to keep him in his service. Even had the lawyer himself been willing to make the attempt, his mother, who kept house for him—an old lady between whom and Chatterton there had never, we have reason to think, been any kind of cordiality—would certainly not have listened to such a thing. What! sleep under the same roof with a profligate young scoundrel that had threatened to make away with himself? Find the garret in a welter some morning with the young rascal's blood, and have a coroner's inquest in the house? Better at once give him up his indentures, and be rid of him! And with this advice of the old lady, even the calmer deliberations of Chatterton's own friends, Barrett, Catcott, and the rest, could not but agree. So on or about Monday, the 16th of April, 1770, it was intimated to Chat-

terton that he must no longer consider himself as in the employment of Mr. Lambert.

Tuesday, the 17th, it will be remembered, was the day of Wilkes's release from prison ; and on Thursday, the 19th—the very day, as we guess, on which the foregoing letter to Mr. Barrett was written—there took place in Bristol that dinner, in honour of the patriot, at which, according to the announcement in the *Public Advertiser*, the more prominent Liberals of the place were to assemble at “the Crown, in the passage from Broad-street to Tower-lane,” to eat their forty-five pounds of meat, drink their forty-five tankards of ale and their forty-five bowls of punch, and smoke their forty-five pipes of tobacco. Were we wrong, then, in fancying that while these guests were making merry in the Crown, Chatterton may have been moodily perambulating the adjacent streets? And shall we be wrong if we fancy, farther, that Barnett was one of the guests ; that the story of Mr. Lambert's apprentice and his intended suicide may have been talked over by the happy gentlemen, when, having finished their toasts, they sat down at leisure to their pipes and their remaining punch ; and that the precise moment when Mr. Barrett may have received the above epistle from his misguided young acquaintance, may have been, when, after seeing Catcott part of the way home, he had just let himself into his surgery, about midnight, with his unsteady latch-key, and begun to whistle, to assure the wakeful Mrs. B. that he was perfectly sober? Shade of the surgeon, or his descendants, if he has any, forgive us, if we wrong him !

### CHAPTER III.

#### IMPROPER FEMALE FRIENDS, AND A JOURNEY TO LONDON.

CAST out of all chance of a livelihood in his native town, there was but one course open to Chatterton : to bid farewell to Bristol and attorneyship, and try what he could do in the great literary mart of London. Sanguine as were his hopes of success, it can have cost him but little thought to make up

his mind to this course ; if, indeed, he did not secretly congratulate himself that his recent escapade had ended so agreeably. Probably there was but one thing that stood in the way of an immediate declaration by himself, after the *fracas* was over, that this was the resolution he had come to—the want, namely, of a little money to serve as outfit. No sooner, therefore, was this obstacle removed by the charitable determination of his friends, Mr. Barrett, Mr. Clayfield, the Catcotts, &c., to make a little subscription for him, so as to present him with the parting gift of a few pounds, than the tide of feeling was turned, and from a state of despondency Chatterton gave way to raptures of unbounded joy. London ! London ! A few days and he should have left the dingy quays of abominable Bristol, and should be treading, in the very footsteps of Goldsmith, Garrick, and Johnson, the liberal London streets !

Chatterton remained exactly a week in Bristol after his dismissal from Mr. Lambert's ; *i. e.* from the 16th to the 24th of April. A busy week we may suppose that must have been to Mrs. Chatterton and her daughter : shirts to be made and buttoned, stockings to be looked after, and all Thomas's wardrobe to be got decently in order against his departure. Poor fellow ! notwithstanding all that idle people say of him, *they* know better ; he has a proud spirit, but a good heart, and he will make his way yet with the best of them ! And so, in their humble apartments, the widow and her daughter ply their needles, talking of Thomas and his prospects, as only a mother and sister can.

The subject of their conversation, meanwhile, is generally out, going from street to street, and taking leave of his friends. Barrett, the two Catcotts, Mr. Alcock, Mr. Clayfield, Burgum, Matthew Mease ; also his younger friends, the Carys, Smiths, and Kators—he makes the round of them all, receiving their good wishes, and making arrangements to correspond with them. To less intimate acquaintances, too, met accidentally in the streets, he has to bid a friendly good-bye. Moreover, there are his numerous female friends—the Miss Webbs, the Miss Thatchers, the Miss Hills, &c., not to

omit the “female Machiavel,” Miss Rumsey; who have all heard, with more or less concern, that they are about to lose their poet, and are, of course, anxious to see him before he goes. Of some acquaintances of this class, probably the more humble of them, he appears to have taken a kind of collective farewell. Long afterwards, at least, a Mrs. Stephens, the wife of a cabinet-maker in Bristol, used to tell that she remembered, when a girl, Chatterton’s “taking leave of her and some others, on the steps of Redcliffe Church, very cheerfully,” before his going to London. “At parting, he said he would give them some gingerbread; and went over the way to Mr. Freeling’s, to buy some.” In connexion with which little anecdote, reader, we have a mysterious little scrap of document to produce.

A great deal of nonsense, as it seems to us, has been written on the question of Chatterton’s moral character. Was he a libertine, as some have represented—a precocious young blackguard, indebted for his bad end to his own habits of profligacy; or was he at least no worse in this respect than his neighbours? Naturally resenting the harsh way in which Chalmers and other earlier biographers of Chatterton handled his memory, the writers of more recent notices have certainly made out, in favour of “the marvellous boy,” a certificate of good behaviour to which he was not entitled, and for which he would not have thanked them. The evidence on which they have laid most stress in connexion with this point is that of Chatterton’s sister, as given by her in her letter to the Rev. Sir Herbert Croft, eight years after Chatterton’s death, and published by that gentleman in his singular book, “Love and Madness.” The following is a passage from that touching and simple epistle, spelt as in the original:—

“He wrote one letter to Sir Horace Warlpool; and except his correspondence with Miss Rumsey, the girl I have mentioned, I know of no other. He would frequently walk the Colledge green with the young girls that stately paraded there to show their finery. But I really believe he was no debauchee (tho’ some have reported it). the dear unhappy boy had faults enough I saw with concern. he was proud and exceedingly impetuous, but that of venality” [poor Mrs. N. thinks this a fine word for *licentiousness*] “he could not be justly accused with. Mrs. Lambert informed me not 2 months before he left Bristol,

he had never been once found out of the office in the stated hours, as they frequently sent the footman and other servants to see. Nor but once stayed out till 11 o'clock; then he had leave, as we entertained some friends at our house at Christmas."

This very distinct piece of evidence in favour of Chatterton's punctual conduct as an apprentice (he had probably the fear of that she-dragon, Mrs. Lambert, before his eyes), has been strained by the writers alluded to into a testimony to his moral reproachlessness. A fruitless attempt, we fear! The worth of a sister's assurance that her deceased brother could not be justly accused of "venality," it is not difficult to estimate; besides that it is accompanied with the information that the common report was to the contrary, and with the allusion to the habit of "walking with the girls on the College-green," whatever that may mean. Then, again, we have the fact that Mr. Barrett, in his remonstrance with him respecting his alarming letter to Mr. Clayfield, attributed his bad state of mind to his keeping immoral company. His own allusions, too, scattered through his writings, are quite decisive, even were we not to take into account the almost constant tone which runs through all that part of his writings that is not antique; evidently the productions, as these modern pieces are, of a clever boy too conscious of forbidden things, and eager (as boys are till some real experience of the heart has made them earnest and silent) to assert his questionable manhood among his compeers, by constant and irreverent talk about the sexes. And, after all, have we not the native probabilities of the case itself? Are young men in general, and attorneys' apprentices in particular, so immaculately moral, that it becomes necessary to argue out something like a perfectly virtuous character for Chatterton, before venturing to introduce him to the admirers of genius and literature? Should we fail in doing this for him, will Byron, Burns, and the rest of them, refuse to shake hands with him? It is a pity, certainly, that we should have to say so. Young men of genius may take warning. That convenient theory of "wild oats," which has been provided and put in circulation for their use by the thoughtless and the interested, better for themselves in the end if they decidedly reject it! Were Byron and Burns,



or were Chatterton himself, to speak now, they would say so too. Greatest is he who, needing no benefit from the theory himself, yet can weigh it, and know how to be charitable!

And now for our document. If the reader were to go to the reading-room of the British Museum, and ask for the Chatterton MSS. (a considerable portion of all the surviving MSS. of Chatterton is in the Museum, the remainder being in Bristol, and elsewhere) he would have three volumes brought to him containing papers and parchments of various shapes and sizes, some stained, smoked, and written like antiques; others undisguisedly modern. If, after overcoming the strange feeling that here in his hands are the very sheets over which eighty years ago Chatterton bent, tracing with nimble fingers the black characters over the white pages, the reader should examine the papers successively and individually, he would come upon one that would puzzle him much. It is a dingy piece of letter-paper, once folded as a letter, and containing a very ugly scrawl in an uneducated female hand.

Here it is, printed for the first time:—

"Sir, I send my Love to you and Tell you This if you prove Constant I not miss but if you frown and Torn away I can make oart of batterd Hay pray excep of me Love Hartley an send me word Cartingley Tell me How maney ounces of Green Gingerbread Can Sho the baker of Honiste.

"My House is not belt with Stavis. I not be Coarted by Boys nor navis. I Haive a man and a man Shall Haive me, if I whaint a fool I Send for Thee.

"If you are going to the D—— I wish you a good Gonery."

What in all the world have we here? Exercising our utmost ingenuity for the purpose of determining, if possible, what petty, and, perhaps, not very nameable, Bristol occurrence of the year 1770, this lamentable piece of ill-written doggrel (the reader will observe that part of the letter is in a kind of cripple rhyme) grew out of, and has come down to us amid the Museum MSS., to perpetuate and represent; we can honestly arrive but at one conclusion—that it is the spiteful epistle of some improper female friend, avenging herself with all the energy of feminine malice, for the *spretæ injuria formæ*, or some other fancied wrong. Did we dare to copy the

version of the letter, or rather jocular answer to it, written in Chatterton's own hand on the back of the sheet, in the shape of a few extremely impolite and not at all quoteable Hudibrastic lines, we think our hypothesis would appear inevitable. In short, we explain the matter thus:—Among the various acquaintances of Chatterton interested in the news of his approaching departure, is some improper female friend, labouring under the provocation of the *spretæ injuria formæ*, or of some injury or fancied injury, not now ascertainable. This Bristol Juno sees, with pangs incredible, her faithless Jove dispensing the gingerbread he has bought at “Mr. Freeling's, over the way,” among the numerous nymphs waiting for it on the steps of Redcliffe Church; she goes home, and discharges all her malevolence in one fell epistle, into which, with vast literary effort, she contrives to introduce an allusion to the gingerbread; this epistle, intended to pierce her Jove's heart like a poisoned arrow, she sends to him anonymously; and he, reading it, and recognising the fair hand of the distempered donor, enjoys the joke amazingly, and expresses his opinion of it and her by scribbling his wicked answer on the other side. Strange bit of defunct real life, thus to be dug up again into the light! The departure of poor Chatterton for London from his native place eighty-six years ago was not, it would thus appear, a circumstance which all Bristol viewed with indifference. Whether the Clayfields, the Barretts, and the Catcotts of his acquaintance, cared much about the matter or not—whether Miss Rumsey shed tears or not,—we cannot say; but here, at least, was one fair and frail denizen of some mean Bristol street, in whose breast Chatterton left a rankling sense of wrong or jealousy, and who was powerfully enough excited by the news of his departure, to immortalise her concern therein by penning a spiteful letter, in which she told him he was reported to be “going to the D——,” and wished him a good journey.

Chatterton was not going to the D—— directly; he was only going to London, to follow the professional walk of literature. Persons going on that journey from the provinces now-a-days (and it must have been the same in Chatterton's time)

usually carry three things with them, in addition to the mere essentials of luggage—a little money, a small bundle of MSS., and a few letters of introduction, volunteered by well-meaning friends. Let us see how Chatterton was furnished in these several respects.

As regards money, the most essential of the three, but very poorly, we fear! It would throw more light than a hundred disquisitions on the real truth of Chatterton's London career, were we able to calculate to the precise shilling the sum of money which he took with him from Bristol. Unfortunately, there are no data for such a calculation. All that remains to us in the shape of information on this point is a vague tradition, the exact worth of which we do not know, that the understood arrangement among the charitable persons who had agreed to get up a little subscription for him against his departure was that they should subscribe a guinea each. Subjecting this tradition to a strict act of judgment, directed by a knowledge of the laws of human nature in general, and the circumstances of Chatterton's Bristol position in particular, we should say that the entire sum that could possibly be in Chatterton's purse in the week before he left Bristol, did not (any contribution his mother could make included) exceed ten guineas. Take a more probable estimate still, and deduct the expenses of the outfit and journey, and we may say Chatterton was elated with the prospect of invading London with a pecuniary force of exactly five guineas.

But he had plenty of manuscripts. In one bundle he had the whole of the Rowley Poems and other antiques—*Ælla*; *the Bristowe Tragedie*; *Goddrynn*; *The Tournament*; *The Battle of Hastings*; *The Parliamente of Sprytes*, &c., &c.; all written and finished at least twelve months before, and forming matter enough to fill, if printed, one considerable volume. These, if he could either dispose of them in the mass or sell them individually, would form a sufficient stock to begin with. On *Ælla*, in particular, he naturally set great value. It was his masterpiece; worth a great deal of money, even as an imitation of the antique, and worth ten times more if he could succeed in getting it accepted as a genuine English poem of

the fifteenth century. Supposing that he should not be able to part with it advantageously under either guise, he would at any rate have it by him, to be printed some day or other at his own expense, and to make his fame as a poet and antiquarian! Then again, in another bundle, he had his miscellaneous modern pieces in prose and in verse—his *Kew Gardens*, his *Consuliad*, and other such satires after the manner of Pope and Churchill; numerous songs, elegies, and other poetical trifles; and an assortment of odds and ends bearing on English antiquities. For these he cared far less himself than for his Rowley poems; but he had already ascertained that they were more disposable as literary ware, and accordingly he had of late almost abandoned the antique vein in their favour. They might be of use to him in his dealings with the magazines and newspapers; and if they should turn out not to be exactly suitable, he had a ready pen and a head full of all kinds of historical knowledge, and should find no difficulty—especially after his sister had forwarded to him his little collection of books that was in the meantime to be left behind under her charge—in throwing off other such papers by the dozen!

Lastly, as regards the matter of introductions. It may seem strange to such as are accustomed to think such things essential to a young man migrating from his native place, but we positively cannot find that Chatterton took one letter of introduction from Bristol with him. That Matthew Mease may have told him of some vintner of his acquaintance living somewhere in Whitechapel that would be glad to see him, if he told him he knew Mat Mease, of Bristol; that Mr. Clayfield, or Mr. Barrett, or even his master, Mr. Lambert, may have recommended him to call, at his leisure, on certain well-to-do Smiths or Robinsons they had dealings with; that his younger friends, the Mr. Carys and Mr. Rudhalls, the Miss Rumseys and Miss Webbs, may have given him commissions and instructions destined to bring him into connexion with metropolitan aunts living in Camden Town, and long-forgotten cousins that had situations in the Custom House; nay, that Mrs. Chatterton herself, taxing, with the grandmother's help, her genealogical memory, may have excogitated for the occasion



a stray relative or two in London, that it might be as well to pay a visit to—is, of course, extremely probable. But—and the reason, in all likelihood, was that his whole circle of acquaintance could not muster such a thing—not a single letter to a literary notability did this “Mad Genius” of Bristol, going on his expedition to set the Thames on fire, take in his portmanteau to be of service to him. Two things only seem to have been decided: the first, that on arriving in London, he should go to lodge at the house of a Mr. Walmsley, a plasterer, in Shoreditch, where a Mrs. Ballance, a distant relative of his mother’s, and who had already been written to on the subject, resided; and the other, that his first care on his arrival should be to seek out Mr. Edmunds, at the *Middlesex Journal* office, in Shoe-lane, and beat up the editorial quarters of the *Town and Country Magazine*. These were to be his *foci* in London; and thence, by the force of his genius, he was to weave out new acquaintanceships, and spread himself in all directions! Nor, on the whole, was this plan perhaps the worst. Young authors coming to London to set the Thames on fire, are by no means always welcome visitors to those more elderly practitioners of the same craft, who, having become convinced by experience of the incombustibility of the river, have settled down on its banks with chastened hopes and more practical intentions; and it is better, in the long run, for young authors themselves to purchase every inch of way they make into people’s good graces by some equivalent addition of new work done and tendered. And yet, who will say that introductions are of no use? The kind word of encouragement spoken now and then by the veteran *littérateur* to his younger brother, the business note written now and then in his service when anything in the shape of work turns up, the friendly invitation now and then when a few of the same craft are to meet—these little courtesies, which it is in the power of introductions, in the proportion perhaps of one effective to ten given, to procure, how much wear and tear of heart may they not save; how many paths through poverty to a rank London churchyard may they not make smoother! These, a little extended and adjusted, would of themselves constitute in these

days, and while the more systematic promises of socialism are in abeyance, a very good organization of literature. Nor, thank God, are these wanting. That hard, austere man of letters, young poet, who receives you so grimly, is so severe on your fallacies and commonplaces, says not a word to flatter you, and would almost drive you from literature to making shoes; let but an opportunity really to serve you present itself, and you shall find that man as true as steel, and as kind as a woman! That other man of letters, too, with the flashing wit and the impetuosity that stuns and blasts you, I could tell you of generous actions done by him! And him, again, the broad, sagacious man of abundant humour and encyclopædic lore; or him on whose silver hairs the honours of a long celebrity sit so gracefully—what debts of gratitude, were they reckoned up, should be found owing by contemporaries to them! Such men there are in London in our own days, each cordial and assisting after his own method and in his own sphere; nor was London wanting in such in the days of Chatterton. Remembering this, and thinking with ourselves at the same time which special man out of the 700,000 and odd souls then inhabiting London, it might have been best for Chatterton to have come into connexion with, we cannot but speculate what might have been the result had Chatterton taken with him from Bristol but one letter of introduction, addressed, suppose, to Oliver Goldsmith. “To Dr. Goldsmith, at No. 2, Brick Court, Middle Temple, favoured by Mr. Chatterton”—one cannot help lingering in fancy over the probable consequences of a letter bearing that superscription. But it did not so happen!

It was on Tuesday, the 24th of April, and, as near as we can guess, between eight and nine in the evening, that Chatterton, who had probably never been a single whole day out of Bristol before, took his final farewell of it. By the help of the *Gentleman's Magazine* for April, 1771, which contains a register of the weather for the same month in the previous year, we are able to tell pretty exactly the state of the weather at the time. Monday, the 23rd, had been “a cloudy day, very cold, with some little hail and a strong north-



west wind ;” and on Tuesday, the 24th, though the wind had veered round to the south-west, it was still “cold and cloudy.” On the evening of that cloudy day, when it is already almost dark, and the streets are damp with approaching rain, three figures stand at an inn-door in Bristol, waiting for the starting of the London coach. They are—Chatterton, wrapped up for his journey, a tight, well-built youth, of middle size ; his sister, a grown young woman, two years older than himself ; and his mother, a sad-looking elderly person, in a cloak. Round about the coach, and greatly in the way of the porters who are putting on the luggage, are one or two young men that have gone there to bid Chatterton once more good-bye. They stand and talk for a few minutes in the midst of the bustle, while the passengers are hurrying backwards and forwards between the coach and the lighted passage of the inn. At last all is ready ; the luggage is put up, and the other passengers have taken their seats. “Good-bye, Tom ; God bless you ; and mind to write as soon as you get to London,” falters the widow for the last time. Tom hears her ; bids her good-bye, his sister good-bye, the rest good-bye ; and springs into his place in what was then called “the basket” of the coach, *i. e.*, an exterior accommodation slung low down to the body. “All right,” cries the guard, and blows his horn ; the coachman cracks his whip, the horses’ hoofs clatter, and away along the ill-lit streets goes the clumsy vehicle out towards the suburbs of Bristol, Chatterton slung in the basket. The widow stands at the inn-door watching it till it disappears ; then, taking her daughter’s arm, and gathering her cloak around her, walks home with a heavy heart through the drizzle !

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## PART II.—LONDON.

### CHAPTER I.—SHOREDITCH.

READER, were you ever in Shoreditch ? If you are an inhabitant of London, you know or may know all about it ; if not, get a map of London, and you will see that the locality named

Shoreditch forms part of one of the great highways leading northwards from the centre of the city towards the suburbs. The part of this highway nearest the city, including about half a mile of houses on both sides, is called Bishopsgate-street, from the fact that here stood one of the ancient gates of the city erected by a Saxon bishop of the seventh century; beyond that, for about a quarter of a mile, the thoroughfare is called Norton Folgate, or, as it was originally pronounced, the Northern Foldgate, after which, extending for another quarter of a mile, and terminating in Hackney, is Shoreditch proper, the principal street of a populous parish of the same name. Tradition ascribes the origin of the name to the circumstance that Jane Shore, the mistress of Edward IV., ended her life here,—

“ Within a ditch of loathsome scent,  
Which carrion dogs did much frequent,”

as the ballad says: but old Stow settles that matter by saying he could prove by record that as early as four hundred years before his time the place had been called Soersditch. However this may be, the place deserves its name. There is, indeed, no vestige of a ditch now perceptible to one passing through the locality, whatever a more strict investigation might disclose; but the neighbourhood has not a very pleasant or wholesome look. The aspect which Shoreditch proper now presents is that of a broad, bustling street of old-fronted houses, full of heterogeneous shops, some of them exhibiting considerable displays of cheap hats, haberdashery, shoes, ready-made clothes, groceries, and the like; but others belonging rather to the costermonger species. Narrower streets, of more mean appearance, branch out from it on both sides. Altogether Shoreditch is not the part of London where a literary man of the present day would voluntarily seek lodgings; and, as there does not seem to have been much change in its importance relatively to other parts of the metropolis during the last eighty years, the case was probably much the same in Chatterton's time. Indeed, long before that, Shoreditch, partly perhaps on account of the peculiar suggestiveness of its name, had obtained an unenviable reputation as a low neigh-

bourhood ; and " to die in Shoreditch " was synonymous, in the writings of the wits of Dryden's time, with dying like a profligate, and having hags for one's nurses.

It was here, however, that Chatterton lodged when he first came to London. We have already mentioned that the only definite arrangement he seems to have made for his sojourn in London, before leaving Bristol, consisted in his having written to Mrs. Ballance, a distant relative of his mother, who lived at the house of a Mr. Walmsley, a plasterer, in Shoreditch, asking her to secure a lodging for him against his arrival. Mrs. Ballance, whom we picture as an elderly female, the widow of some seafaring man, living in London in a meagre, eleemosynary way, appears to have replied to this letter by writing to Mrs. Chatterton that Thomas had better come at once to Mr. Walmsley's, where he could be accommodated in the meantime at least, and where she would do her best to make him comfortable.

Accordingly, it was to Mr. Walmsley's, in Shoreditch, that Chatterton, on his arrival in London, on the evening of Wednesday, the 25th of April, 1770, contrived to make his way. Where the Bristol coach of that day stopped, we do not know ; though, doubtless, even that might be ascertained if we were very anxious about it ; but, presuming that it was in the yard of some inn near the heart of the city, Chatterton would not have had far to go before introducing himself to Mrs. Ballance, if, indeed, the good woman did not make her appearance at the coach to meet her young relative, and help him to carry home his small allowance of luggage. It shows the impatience and the spirit of the young stranger thus deposited in the streets of London, that, late as it was when he arrived at Mr. Walmsley's (it must have been between five and six o'clock in the evening), and tired as he must have been with his twenty hours' journey, he did not remain within doors any time ; but having seen his boxes safe, and escaped the assiduities of Mrs. Ballance, sallied out for a ramble, and to make calls on the persons through whose patronage he hoped to gain a footing in literary circles. So much, at least, we infer from the following letter to his mother, written on the

morning of the 26th, after having slept his first night at Mr. Walmsley's, and giving an account of his journey and his first proceedings in London:—

“London, April 26th, 1770.

“DEAR MOTHER,—Here I am, safe and in high spirits. To give you a journal of my tour would not be unnecessary. After riding in the basket to Brislington, I mounted the top of the coach, and rid easy, and was agreeably entertained with the conversation of a Quaker *in dress*, but little so in personals and behaviour. This laughing Friend, who is a carver, lamented his having sent his tools to Worcester, as otherwise he would have accompanied me to London. I left him at Bath; when, finding it rained pretty fast, I entered an inside passenger to Speenhamland, the half-way stage, paying seven shillings. 'Twas lucky I did so, for it snowed all night, and on Marlborough Downs the snow was near a foot high.

“At seven in the morning I breakfasted at Speenhamland, and then mounted the coach-box for the remainder of the day, which was a remarkable fine one. Honest Gee-ho complimented me with assuring me that I sat bolder and tighter than any person who ever rid with him. Dined at Stroud most luxuriously with a young gentleman who had slept all the preceding night in the machine, and an old mercantile genius, whose school-boy son had a great deal of wit, as the father thought, in remarking that Windsor was as old as *our Saviour's time*.

“Got into London about five o'clock in the evening. Called upon Mr. Edmunds, Mr. Fell, Mr. Hamilton, and Mr. Dodsley. Great encouragement from them; all approved of my design. Shall soon be settled. Call upon Mr. Lambert; show him this, or tell him if I deserve a recommendation, he would oblige me to give me one; if I do not, it will be beneath him to take notice of me. Seen all aunts, cousins—all well—and I am welcome. Mr. T. Wensley is alive, and coming home. Sister, grandmother, &c. &c. &c., remember.

“I remain your dutiful son,

“T. CHATTERTON.”

It is a curious corroboration of Chatterton's account of the weather during his journey, that, in the meteorological registers of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, Wednesday, the 25th of April, 1770—the day on which Chatterton sat beside the driver of the Bristol coach all the way from Speenhamland to London—is entered as a day of “smart frost, very bright and very cold,” snow having fallen in some parts of the country during the previous night. It was on the evening of this bright, cold day, therefore, that Chatterton, as we fancy, setting out from Mr. Walmsley's between five and six o'clock, contrived, by inquiring his way of people he met, to pilot himself along Shoreditch, Norton Folgate, and Bishopsgate-street, towards the city, bent as he was on calling that very evening on the four gentlemen mentioned in his letter—Mr. Edmunds, Mr. Fell, Mr. Hamilton, and Mr. Dodsley. Let us see if we can make out anything respecting these

gentlemen: they were the first persons Chatterton visited in London; and some of them had not a little to do with his subsequent fate.

Mr. Edmunds has been already introduced to the reader. He was the proprietor, editor, and publisher of the *Middlesex Journal*, a bi-weekly newspaper, to which, we have seen, Chatterton had sent several communications from Bristol. His offices were in Shoe-lane, Holborn. Of Mr. Hamilton we learn something from that interesting collection of scraps, "Nichols's Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century." He was the printer and proprietor of *The Town and Country Magazine*, in which capacity Chatterton had, as we know, for some time corresponded with him. He was the son of one Archibald Hamilton, a Scotchman, who having been obliged to quit Edinburgh in 1736, for having been actively concerned in the Porteous riot, had settled in London as a printer, and had made a considerable fortune there. The son, Archibald, enjoying the benefit of his father's connexion, had also set up as a printer. He had, says Nichols, two printing offices, one "in the country, on the road between Highgate and Finchley," the other in town, "near St. John's Gate, Clerkenwell;" and it was probably in allusion to this circumstance that, when he started a new magazine, in the beginning of 1769, he named it *The Town and Country Magazine*. The magazine, Nichols informs us, had "a prodigious sale." Nichols also gives us some particulars relative to Dodsley, in addition to those already communicated to the reader. Having succeeded his brother Robert, whose junior he was by twenty-two years, in the year 1759, James Dodsley had carried on the bookselling business in Pall Mall so profitably as to be already a wealthy man. When he died in 1797, he left a fortune of 70,000*l.*; and a good part of this sum must have been accumulated before 1770, when he was forty-five years of age. "By a habit of excluding himself from the world," says Nichols, "Mr. James Dodsley, who certainly possessed a liberal heart and a strong understanding, had acquired many peculiarities." One of these is mentioned as specially characteristic. "He



kept a carriage many years, but studiously wished his friends should not know it; nor did he ever use it on the eastern side of Temple Bar." The inscription on the tablet erected to the memory of the bookseller in St. James's Church, Westminster, where he was buried, is to the same effect. "He was a man," says the epitaph, "of a retired and contemplative turn of mind, though engaged in a very extensive line of public business; he was upright and liberal in his dealings, a friend to the afflicted in general, and to the poor of this parish in particular,"—in fact, an eccentric, shy, good sort of man. Finally, as regards Mr. Fell. From what Chatterton says of him, we learn that he was printer, publisher, and editor of the *Freeholder's Magazine*, a periodical conducted in the interest of Wilkes, and to which, as well as to the *Town and Country*, Chatterton had recently sent articles for insertion. We imagine him, on some shadow of authority, to have been a needy, nondescript kind of publisher, with a place of business in Paternoster Row, and not nearly so respectable as either Edmunds or Hamilton, not to speak of Dodsley.

Such were the four persons upon whom we are to imagine the impetuous young fellow, who had just come off the Bristol coach, dropping in unexpectedly between light and dark on a cold April evening, eighty-six years ago. His hopes from Edmunds were, of course, chiefly in connexion with the *Middlesex Journal*, for which he could furnish poems and paragraphs. Through Fell he might get a footing in the *Freeholder's Magazine*, and whatever else of a literary kind might be going on under the auspices of Wilkes. From Hamilton he looked for some definite and paying engagement on the *Town and Country*. From Dodsley his expectations were probably still higher. Besides being the publisher of the *Annual Register*, and the friend of Burke and other notable political men, Dodsley was a bookseller on a large scale, and a publisher of poetry; it was to him that Chatterton had applied by letter sixteen months before as a likely person to publish his *Ælla*; one or two letters had probably passed between them since; and in resolving to introduce himself personally



to this magnate of books, Chatterton had, doubtless, dreams not only of the opening of the *Annual Register* to his lucubrations, but also of the appearance of his Rowley performances some day or other in the form of one or more well-printed volumes, the wonder of all the critics. It was with these views on the persons severally concerned, that Chatterton made his four rapid calls. The enterprise was certainly less Quixotic than if a young literary provincial, now-a-days, were, on the first day of his being in London, to resolve at once to call on Murray or Longman, then to beat up the office of the *Daily News* in search of the editor; after that to knock at Mr. Parker's door to seek an engagement on *Fraser*; and finally to go and see what could be done on *Dickens's Household Words*. Still, making all allowance for the difference in point of editorial and bibliopolic dignity between that day and this, the idea of achieving interviews with four different editors and publishers in one ramble was somewhat bold. As regards mere time and distance, to compass calls, in such circumstances, on four different individuals—one of these living in Shoe Lane, another at St. John's Gate, Clerkenwell, a third in Pall Mall, and the fourth somewhere else—can have been no easy task. But Chatterton was a resolute youth, with plenty of the faculty of self-assertion, and capable, as we imagine, not only of making four calls in one walk, but also of going through each without any unnecessary degree of bashfulness. We have no doubt that he saw Hamilton, Fell, Edmunds, and Dodsley himself, with the most perfect self-assurance; that he explained his case to them, and stated what he wanted from them, very distinctly; and that with the advantage he had in having corresponded with all of them before, he came off from the interviews in a very satisfactory manner. As to how they received him, and what they said to him, we have but his own words to his mother:—"Great encouragement from them: all approved of my design." The meaning of this is somewhat problematical. Dodsley, we imagine, nervous and shy person as he was, may have been not a little discomposed by the talk of the impetuous young visitor who had so unceremoniously burst

in upon him ; and, while listening with tolerable courtesy to what he said, may have been mentally resolving to have nothing more to do with that odd Bristol lad, if once he could get him out. Hamilton and Edmunds, we fancy, were civil and general, with perhaps an intention to let the lad write for them, if he chose to do so. Fell, as a needier man, and more ready to catch at a promising literary recruit, was, we imagine, the most cordial of all.

And so, tired and yet happy, the young stranger bent his steps homeward in the direction of Shoreditch. Ah ! we wonder if, in passing along Shoe Lane after his interview with Edmunds, brushing with his shoulder the ugly black wall of that workhouse burying-ground on the site of which Farringdon market now stands, any presentiment occurred to him of a spectacle which, four short months afterwards, that very spot was to witness—these young limbs of his, *now* so full of life, *then* closed up stark and unclaimed in a workhouse shell, and borne carelessly and irreverently by one or two men along that very wall to a pauper's hasty grave ! Ah ! no, he paces all unwittingly, poor young heart, that spot of his London doom, where even I, remembering him, shudder to tears ; for God, in his mercy, hangs the veil !

In what precise part of Shoreditch that house of Mr. Walmsley was where Chatterton lodged when he first came to London, and to which, on that memorable day, he returned through many dark and strange streets, we do not know. London Directories of the year 1770 are not things easy to be found ; and, could we find one, we should not be very certain to find Mr. Walmsley's name in it. In these circumstances the literary antiquary, as he walks along Shoreditch, may be allowed to single out, as the object of his curiosity, any old-looking house he pleases along the whole length of the thoroughfare on either side ; it being stipulated only that the house so selected shall be conceivable as having once been the abode of a plasterer. For our part, we have an incommunicable impression as if the house were to be sought in the close vicinity of the present terminus of the Eastern Counties Railway, or where Shore-

ditch passes into Norton Folgate. Let that fancy stand, therefore, in lieu of a better.

Here then Chatterton, tired with his long walk through the streets, slept his first night in London. Here, on the following morning, he breakfasted in the company of his relative, Mrs. Ballance, giving her the news of Bristol, and receiving from her such bits of news in return as she had to communicate; and amongst them the intelligence conveyed in his letter home, that Mr. T. Wensley—a seaman or petty officer, as we learn from a subsequent allusion, on board a King's ship, but a native of Bristol, and on that account known to Mrs. Chatterton and his sister—was alive, and on his way home. Hence also he sets out to visit those aunts and cousins mentioned in the letter as being all well and glad to see him; and who, it is to be hoped, did not live far from Shoreditch. Here, some time or other in the course of the day—Thursday, the 26th; his first real day in London, and “a very coarse, wet, cold day” it was, says the *Gentleman's Magazine*—he writes the letter in question, so as to send it by that day's post. And here, during the remaining days of that month,—Friday, the 27th, “a very coarse wet day, but not so cold;” Saturday, the 28th, “a heavy morning, bright afternoon, cold wind;” Sunday the 29th, “a very bright day, hot sun, cold wind;” and Monday the 30th, “chiefly bright, flying clouds, no rain, and warm;”—he soon finds himself fairly domiciled, becoming more familiar with the Walmsleys and Mrs. Ballance, whom he sees in the mornings; and starting off every forenoon for a walk along Norton Folgate and Bishopsgate Street, towards those quarters of the metropolis where the chief attractions lay.

Chatterton lived in Mr. Walmsley's house in Shoreditch about six weeks in all, or from the 24th of April till the beginning of June. We are fortunately able to give a somewhat particular account of the economy of Mr. Walmsley's family, and of the kind of accommodation which Chatterton had there, and the kind of impression he produced on the various members of it during his stay. The Rev. Sir Herbert Croft, already alluded to as one who took much pains—more pains,

in fact, than anybody else from that time to this—to inform himself of the real particulars of Chatterton's life, took the judicious plan of hunting out the Walmsley family in Shore-ditch, while the memory of Chatterton was still fresh, and ascertaining all he could from them regarding the habits of the singular being whose brief stay among them had been an event of such consequence in the history of their humble household. The following is an extract from the reverend baronet's *Love and Madness*, embodying all he could gather about Chatterton from this source:—

“The man and woman where he first lodged, are still (1780) living in the same house. He is a plasterer. They, and their nephew and niece (the latter about as old as Chatterton would be now, the former three years younger), and Mrs. Ballance, who lodged in the house and desired them to let Chatterton, her relation, live there also—have been seen. The little collected from them you shall have in their own words.

“Mrs. Ballance says he was as proud as Lucifer. He very soon quarrelled with her for calling him ‘Cousin Tommy,’ and asked her if she ever heard of a poet's being called *Tommy*; but she assured him that she knew nothing of poets, and only wished he would not set up for a gentleman. Upon her recommending it to him to get into some office, when he had been in town two or three weeks, he stormed about the room like a madman, and frightened her not a little, by telling her that he hoped, with the blessing of God, very soon to be sent prisoner to the Tower, which would make his fortune. He would often look steadfastly in a person's face, without speaking, or seeming to see the person for a quarter of an hour or more, till it was quite frightful; during all which time (she supposes, from what she has since heard) his thoughts were gone about something else. He frequently declared that he should settle the nation before he had done: but how could she think that her poor cousin Tommy was so great a man as she now finds he was? His mother should have written word of his greatness, and then, to be sure, she would have humoured the gentleman accordingly.

“Mr. Walmsley observed little in him, but that there was something manly and pleasing about him, and that he did not dislike the wenches.

“Mrs. Walmsley's account is, that she never saw any harm of him—that he never *mislist*ed her, but was always very civil whenever they met in the house by accident; that he would never suffer the room in which he used to read and write to be swept, because, he said, poets hated brooms; that she told him she did not know any thing poet-folks were good for, but to sit in a dirty cap and gown in a garret, and at last to be starved; that, during the nine (?) weeks he was at her house, he never stayed out after the family hours except once, when he did not come home all night, and had been, she heard, *poeting* a song about the streets. (This night, Mrs. Ballance says, she knows he lodged at a relation's because Mr. Walmsley's house was shut up when he came home.)

“The niece says, for her part, she always took him more for a mad boy than anything else, he would have such flights and *vagaries*; that, but for his face, and her knowledge of his age, she should never have thought him a boy, he was so manly, and *so much himself*; that no women came after him, nor did she know of any connexion—but still that he was a sad rake, and terribly fond of women, and would sometimes be saucy to her; that he ate what he chose to have, with his relation, Mrs. Ballance, who lodged in the house; but that he never touched meat, and drank only water, and seemed to live on the air. . . . The niece adds, that he was good-tempered, and agreeable, and obliging, but sadly

proud and haughty : nothing was too good for him ; nor was anything to be too good for his grandmother, mother, and sister, hereafter. . . . That he used to sit up almost all night, reading and writing ; and that her brother said he was afraid to lie with him—for, to be sure, he was a *spirit*, and never slept ; for he never came to bed till it was morning, and then, for what he saw, never closed his eyes.

“ The nephew (Chatterton’s bed-fellow during the first six weeks he lodged there) says that, notwithstanding his pride and haughtiness, it was impossible to help liking him ; that he lived chiefly upon a bit of bread, or a tart, and some water—but he once saw him take a sheep’s tongue out of his pocket ; that Chatterton, to his knowledge, never slept while they lay together ; that he never came to bed till very late, sometimes three or four o’clock, and was always awake when he (the nephew) waked, and got up at the same time, about five or six ; that almost every morning the floor was covered with pieces of paper not so big as sixpences, into which he had torn what he had been writing before he came to bed.”

Bating some coarse spitefulness, if we may so call it, in the recollection of Chatterton’s haughty airs, apparent in the evidence of Mrs. Ballance and the niece, and a slight tendency to the marvellous apparent in that of the nephew (who was but a boy of fourteen when Chatterton shared the room with him), the above presents, we believe, a picture of Chatterton as he appeared in the narrow Walmsley circle, as accurate as it is vivid. Walmsley himself we rather like. We fancy him an easy sort of fellow, not troubling himself much about domestic matters, going out to his work in the morning, and leaving his lodger to the somewhat intrusive care of the women-folks. After he is gone, we are to suppose, Chatterton spends the morning in reading and writing, while Mrs. Walmsley, Mrs. Ballance, and the niece are slatterning about the house ; and generally, as the forenoon advances, he goes out for his walk towards the places of London resort. Along Norton Folgate, and Bishopsgate Street, passing crowds of people and hackney-coaches, and glancing, with the eye of an antiquarian and a *connoisseur* in old architecture, at such buildings of antique aspect as were and are conspicuous in that thoroughfare—the old church of St. Helen’s, the old church of St. Ethelburga, and that much-admired remnant of the civic architecture of the fifteenth century, Crosby Hall, or Crosby Place, mentioned in Shakespeare’s Richard III. : let the metropolitan reader distinctly figure this as the usual direction followed by Chatterton in his walks from Mr. Walmsley’s, in Shoreditch. Beyond that, his wanderings may be various ;

frequently, of course, along the main line of Cornhill, past the Bank, as it then was, and the then new Mansion House, into Cheapside; thence slowly along the purlieus of St. Paul's, with a peculiar lingering among the book-shops of Paternoster Row; and further, down Ludgate Hill, and up Fleet Street, towards Temple Bar and the Strand. Visits of business were, we may be sure, not neglected: and, in achieving his transits from one place to another, Chatterton, like the rest of us, may have been guilty of the egregious folly of attempting short cuts, and so may have bewildered himself among mazes of mean streets, proving their populousness by swarms of children, yet never to be seen by him, or by anybody else, more than once.

Oh! the weariness of these aimless walks of a young literary adventurer, without a purse or a friend, in the streets of London! The perpetual and anxious thought within, which scarcely any street-distraction can amuse; the listlessness with which, on coming to the parting of two ways, one suffers the least accident to determine which way one will take, both being indifferent; the vain castle-building in sanguine moments, when thousands of pounds seem possible and near; the utter prostration of spirit at other moments, when one inspects the shivering beggar that passes with new interest, as but another form of one's self, and when every glimpse of a damp, grassless churchyard through a railing acts as a horrible premonition of what may be the end; the curious and habitual examination of physiognomies met as one goes along; the occasional magic of a bright eye, or a lovely form, shooting a pang through the heart, and calling up, it may be, the image of a peerless one, distant, denied, but unforgotten, till the soul melts in very tenderness, and all the past is around one again; the sudden start from such a mood, the flush, the clenched hand, the set teeth, the resolve, the manly hope, the dream of a home quiet, and blest after all with one sweet presence; and then, after that, the more composed gait, and the saunter towards the spots one prefers, till the waning day, or the need to work and eat, brings one back fatigued to the lonely room! And so from day to day a repetition of the



same process. Ah, London, London! thou perpetual home of a shifting multitude, how many a soul is there not within thee at this hour, who, listening to that peculiar roar of thine, which shows the concourse of myriads in thee, all cooperating for their ends, and yet feeling excluded, like an unclaimed atom, from the midst of thy bustle, might cry aloud to thee, and say, "I, too, am strong; I am young; I am willing; I can do something; leave me not out; attend to me; make room for me; devise the means of absorbing me, and such as me, within thy just activity; and defer not till I and they make thee hearken with our shrieks!" But London rolls on; and men, young and old, do demand impossible things! If it defies us to make the medium without conform, some power is at least left, to shape and rule the spirit within!

Chatterton, we believe, came to London with as practical and resolute a spirit as any literary adventurer before or since. His excitement with his change of position, his confidence in being able to make his way, and his activity in availing himself of every means of doing so, seem to have been really prodigious. Hence, probably, his first walks in London were as little listless as was possible in the circumstances. Instead of idle and aimless saunterings, such as we have described, many of his London walks during the first week or two of his stay at Shoreditch must have been direct visits from spot to spot, and from person to person. By no means diffident or bashful, and, so far as we can see, perfectly heart-whole as regarded all the Bristol beauties he had left, he probably wasted less time than many others with less genius would have wasted, in useless regrets and pointless reveries. Compared with his position at Bristol, as the miserable drudge of a lawyer's office, his present life, as a free literary rover in London, appeared to him, doubtless, all but paradisaic. To work in the morning in his lodging in Shoreditch, with sometimes a saucy word for his landlady's niece, though not so saucy by half as the slut would have liked; then to go out to make calls, and see sights in various quarters, buying a tart at a pastrycook's for his dinner, spending a shilling, or, perhaps, two, in other little indulgences, and quite alive always

to the distraction of a pretty face wherever he chanced to be ; then to come home again at an earlier or a later hour, and to sit up half the night writing and tearing papers, greatly to the bewilderment and alarm of that very ill-used boy, Master Walmsley, who lost, we dare say, half his natural allowance of sleep in watching his movements from beneath the blankets :—here was happiness, here was liberty, here was a set of conditions in which to commence the process of setting fire to the Thames ! So, at least, it seemed to Chatterton himself during his first fortnight in London ; for when Mrs. Ballance, at the end of that period, ventured to suggest that he should try to get into some office, we have seen what thanks the poor woman got. To be sure, had Mrs. Chatterton sent her word beforehand what a great man Cousin Tommy was, she would have humoured the gentleman accordingly ! But how was she to know ? Ah ! how, indeed ?

## CHAPTER II.

### TOWN-TALK EIGHTY YEARS AGO.

IN coming to London, Chatterton, of course, came into the midst of all the politics and current talk of the day. Bristol, indeed, as a bustling and mercantile place, had had its share of interest in the general on-goings of the nation ; and regularly, as the coach had brought down the last new materials of gossip from London, the politicians of Bristol had gone through the budget, and given the Bristol *imprimatur*, or the reverse, to the opinions pronounced by the metropolitan authorities. Sometimes, too, Bristol, from its western position and its extensive shipping connexions, might have the start even of London in a bit of American news. On the whole, however, going from Bristol to London was, as regarded opportunities of insight into the affairs of the day, like going from darkness into light, from the suburbs to the centre, from the shilling gallery to the pit-stalls. Let us see what were the pieces (small enough they seem now), in course of performance on the stage of British life eighty years ago, when Chatterton

had thus just shifted his place in the theatre ; in other words, what were the topics which afforded matter of talk to that insatiable gossip, the Town, towards the end of April and during the whole of May, 1770.

First, then, and monopolising nearly the whole ground of the domestic politics of the time, was the everlasting case of Wilkes and Liberty, begun seven years before, when Chatterton was a boy at Colston's school, but still apparently far from a conclusion. There had been a change, however, in the relative situations of the parties in this case.

Among the most earnest defenders of Wilkes and advocates of the right of free election, which they considered unconstitutionally violated in his case, were the authorities of the Corporation of the City of London, then under the mayoralty of the celebrated Beckford. With other corporations and public bodies, they had sent in petitions to the King on the subject. These petitions having been ungraciously received, Beckford and his colleagues had had the boldness to wait on the King (March 14th), and address a personal remonstrance to him. The King's reply was as follows :—

“ I shall always be ready to receive the requests and to listen to the complaints of my subjects ; but it gives me great concern to find that any of them should have been so far misled as to offer me an address and remonstrance, the contents of which I cannot but consider as disrespectful to me, injurious to my parliament, and irreconcilable to the principles of the constitution.”

Having read this speech, the King gave the Lord Mayor and others of the deputation his hand to kiss ; after which, as they were withdrawing, he turned round to his courtiers and burst out laughing. “ Nero fiddled whilst Rome was burning,” was the grandiloquent remark of Parson Horne on the occasion ; and, though this was a little too strong, it is certain that the City-people were very angry. So, out of revenge, and partly as a compensation to Wilkes for his exclusion from the House of Commons, they made Wilkes an alderman. The patriot had hardly been out of prison a week when, on 24th of April—the day on which Chatterton left Bristol—he was sworn in as alderman for the ward of Farringdon Without, and received a magnificent banquet on the occasion. This accession of Wilkes to the Corporation of the City of London, was

not only a kind of defiance to the Court and the ruling party ; it was also intended to increase the power of the City to annoy these enemies in future. With such a man as Beckford as mayor, and with such men as Wilkes, Sawbridge, Townshend, and Crosby, on the bench of aldermen—all popular men and of strong liberal opinions—what might the corporation not do ?

The same part which was being acted in the City by the Lord Mayor Beckford and his colleagues, was acted, within the more important sphere of parliament, by the Opposition in both houses. The parliament of that session had been opened on the 9th of January, and it was to be prorogued on the 19th of May. The case of Wilkes had been before it from the first to last, so that it had discussed little else. Uniting in this case, and making it the ground of a common antagonism to the Court and the ministry, the various elements of the Opposition had constituted themselves into a powerful phalanx, the leaders of which, in the one house, were Lord Chatham, the Marquis of Rockingham, the Dukes of Richmond, Portland, and Devonshire, and Lords Shelburne and Temple ; and in the other house Edmund Burke, Colonel Barré, George Grenville, and others. It was Wilkes, Wilkes, with these men every day of the session ; whenever, in short, they wished to have a wrestling-match with the ministers. Thus, on the very first day of the session, Chatham had made a motion on the subject in the House of Lords, on which occasion, to the surprise of everybody, the Lord Chancellor Camden seceded from his colleagues, and expressed his disapprobation of their policy. He was forthwith deprived of the seals, and the Lord Chancellorship went a-begging. Then followed, as we know, the resignation of the premiership by the Duke of Grafton, and the formation of a second edition of the same cabinet under Lord North. It was in this unpopular North administration of 1770 that young Charles Fox, then the greatest rake and gambler about town, first took office as a junior lord of the Admiralty ; and the earliest parliamentary displays of this future chief of the Whig statesmen were in the cause of that very policy to the denunciation and destruc-

tion of which he afterwards devoted his remarkable life. Many were the gibes against this young orator of the North party, whose abilities were already recognised, and whose swarthy complexion and premature corpulence (he was only twenty-one when the wits nicknamed him Niger Fox the Fat), made him a good butt for personal attacks; and a caricature of the day is still extant with the title of "The Death of the Foxes," in which Lord Holland as the old fox, and his son Charles as the young one, are represented hanging from a gallows, while Farmer Bull and his wife are rejoicing over their emancipated poultry. Fox was, of course, no friend to Wilkes, and, in the lower house, it devolved on him to resist the motions of Burke and Barré in connexion with Wilkes's case. It was in the House of Lords, however, that the agitation on that case was chiefly kept up. Among the most decisive measures of the Opposition was a renewed motion of Chatham's in that house on the 1st of May—that is, some days after Wilkes's release and promotion to the dignity of alderman—"to repeal and rescind the resolutions of the House of Commons in regard to the expulsion and incapacitation of Mr. Wilkes." There was a stormy debate, in which the principal speakers were, on the one side, the Duke of Richmond, Lord Chatham, Lord Lyttleton, Lord Camden, Lord Shelburne, and Lord Stanhope; and, on the other, the Duke of Grafton, Lord Denbigh, Lord Mansfield, Lord Egmont, Lord Pomfret, Lord Weymouth, and Lord Gower. The motion was lost by a majority of eighty-nine against forty-three votes. Judging from the following paragraph in the *London Evening News* of May the 8th, the excitement in town, on the week following this motion, must have been even greater than usual:—

"*Tuesday, May 8th.*—Yesterday a great number of people assembled in the lobby of the House of Commons and the avenues adjoining, in consequence of a report which had been spread that Mr Alderman Wilkes intended to go thither that day to claim a seat. The crowd was so great that members were hindered from passing and repassing, whereupon the gallery was ordered to be locked and the lobby to be cleared. But Mr. Wilkes did not go to the House."

As parliament was prorogued on the 19th of May, there was an end, for that season, to all parliamentary discussion of



the case of Wilkes. Members, to use the words of Junius, "retired into summer quarters to rest from the disgraceful labours of the campaign;" (poor members of parliament now-a-days have to drudge, in the hot weather, for three months longer;) and Wilkes had to be content with sitting on the bench as an alderman, and organizing, along with Beckford, Sawbridge, and the rest of the City-folks, a new deputation to gall the King. One of the most famous incidents of the day was the interview of this deputation with the King on the 23d of May; an interview which was not procured without difficulty. The deputation having been introduced into the royal presence, the Lord Mayor, Beckford, read a "humble remonstrance" to his Majesty—with as much spice in it, however, as the form of such documents allowed—on the decisive terms in which he had been pleased to characterise their address and petition of the 14th of March. The King was implored to "break through all the secret and visible machinations to which the City of London had owed its late severe repulse," and to "disclaim the malignant and pernicious advice" which had induced him to meet the former deputation with so sharp an answer; "an advice of most dangerous tendency, inasmuch as thereby the exercise of the clearest rights of the subject—namely, to petition the King for redress of grievances, to complain of the violation of the freedom of election, to pray dissolution of parliament, to point out malpractices in administration, and to urge the removal of evil ministers—hath, by the generality of one compendious word, been indiscriminately checked with reprimand." No sooner had the King heard this than, facing Beckford in a way to show his natural obstinacy, he read the following answer:—

"I should have been wanting to the public, as well as to myself, if I had not expressed my dissatisfaction at the late address. My sentiments on that subject continue the same; and I should ill deserve to be considered as the Father of my people, if I should suffer myself to be prevailed upon to make such an use of my prerogative as I cannot but think inconsistent with the interest, and dangerous to the constitution of the kingdom."

Whereupon Beckford, excited beyond all regard for the usual formalities of royal audiences, burst forth in an extempore speech:—



“Most gracious Sovereign, will your Majesty be pleased so far to condescend as to permit the mayor of your loyal City of London to declare in your royal presence, on behalf of his fellow-citizens, how much the bare apprehension of your Majesty’s displeasure would at all times affect their minds. The declaration of that displeasure has already filled them with inexpressible anxiety, and with the deepest affliction. Permit me, sire, to assure your Majesty, that your Majesty has not, in all your dominions, any subjects more faithful, more dutiful, or more affectionate to your Majesty’s person and family, or more ready to sacrifice their lives and fortunes in the maintenance of the true honour and dignity of your crown.

“We do, therefore, with the greatest humility and submission, most earnestly supplicate your Majesty that you will not dismiss us from your presence without expressing a more favourable opinion of your faithful citizens, and without some comfort, without some prospect at least of redress.

“Permit me, sire, further to observe, that whoever has already dared, or shall hereafter endeavour, by false insinuations and suggestions, to alienate your Majesty’s affections from your loyal subjects in general, and from the City of London in particular, and to withdraw your confidence in and regard for your people, is an enemy to your Majesty’s person and family, a violator of the public peace, and a betrayer of our happy constitution, as it was established at the glorious Revolution.”

This bold harangue, so contrary to all rules of etiquette, produced a kind of consternation among the courtiers; the King, who had been, as it were, trapped into hearing it by the surprise of the moment, resented it as an insult; and the deputation retired with the consciousness that the breach between the City of London and the King had been made wider than ever. Beckford, however, gained great credit by his conduct; the speech that he had made to the King was in everybody’s lips; and, for the time, he rose to as high a station of popularity as Wilkes.

While the case of Wilkes, with the numerous questions that had grown out of it, thus formed the chief matter of controversy in the politics of the day, there was another question fraught, as the issue proved, with still more remarkable consequences, which, after having been a topic of occasional discussion for several years, began, about the time of Chatterton’s arrival in London, to assume a more pressing and public aspect. This was the question of the disaffection of the American colonies.

In the year 1764-5, as all readers of American history know, the parliament of Great Britain gave the first deadly shock to the allegiance of the American colonies to the British crown, by decreeing the imposition on these colonies of a general stamp

tax, for the purposes of revenue. The colonies, severally and conjointly, had protested and petitioned against this act of authority; in 1767 the stamp tax had been exchanged for a duty on paper, glass, painters' colours, and teas. This, however, had not satisfied the Americans, and from year to year the topic had been brought up in Parliament, along with that of Wilkes—the politicians and writers who took the side of Wilkes generally also sympathising with the resistance of the American colonists to the Home Government; while the Court party, on the other hand, who opposed Wilkes, were also eager for maintaining the prerogative of Britain over the colonies. Things had come to such a pass that many shrewd persons foresaw a war with the colonies, and prophesied their separation from the mother-country. It was the fear of this result that prompted the administration of Lord North, immediately after its accession, in the beginning of 1770, to repeal so much of the Act of 1767 as imposed duties on glass, paper, and painters' colours, retaining only the duty on tea. As, by such an arrangement, the obnoxious *principle*, to which the Americans were repugnant, was still maintained and asserted, there was little doubt that it would prove of no avail. But before news could arrive of the manner in which the Americans had received it, a piece of intelligence crossed the Atlantic which increased the bitterness of the ministerial feeling against the intractable folks on the other side of the water. On the 26th of April, Chatterton's first day in London, there appeared in the London evening papers paragraphs conveying the news of a serious riot which had occurred in the streets of Boston on the 13th of March. The riot had originated in a quarrel between some of the soldiers, who had been quartered in the town, greatly against the wishes of the inhabitants, and the men at a rope-manufactory, belonging to a Mr. Gray. The people of Boston, highly incensed against the military, both on account of their insolent behaviour, and because they had been sent among them to enforce the odious Tax Act, took part with the rope-makers. There was a violent disturbance of the peace; the troops fired on the people, and some unoffending persons

were killed : the whole town rose, and, to prevent still worse results, the military commander had to withdraw the soldiers to some distance. "Had they not been withdrawn," said a private letter from Boston, which appeared in the *London Morning Post*, "the Bostonians would have set fire to their beacon, a tar-barrel stuck on the top of a mast on a high hill, and raised the country for eighty miles round."

Such was the news which the American post brought to London on the day when Chatterton began his residence in Shoreditch. For a week, or more, the town was full of it; the Wilkes party rejoicing over it as a new embarrassment to ministers, and the ministers themselves not knowing very well what to say or think about it. From that time a war with the colonies seemed a probable event.

In addition to the protracted Wilkes controversy, and to this matter of the Boston riot, and its connexion with colonial policy, there were, of course, a variety of minor incidents of more or less interest, affording materials for gossip to the town during the first five or six weeks of Chatterton's sojourn in it. At that time, as in this, there were balls, horse-races, theatrical performances, murders, robberies, marriages in high life, fires, &c. &c., all duly announced in the public papers, and all excellent as *pabulum* for the conversation of the idle and the curious. By way of sample, and that our readers may the more easily fill out the picture for themselves, we shall string together a few of those defunct *minutiæ*, as we gather them quite miscellaneously from the columns of the contemporary newspapers :—

*Wednesday, April 25* (day of Chatterton's arrival in London).—"Ranelagh House will be opened this evening with the usual entertainments. Admittance, 2s. 6d. each person, coffee and tea included. The house will continue to be open on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays till farther notice. N.B. There will be an armed guard on horseback to patrol the roads." *Advertisement in Public Advertiser of that day*

*Same evening.* At Drury lane, the following performances : *The Clandestine Marriage* Lord Ogleby, by Mr. Dibdin; Miss Sterling, by Miss Pope. After which, *The Padlock*, a musical piece. Benefit of Mr. Dibdin.

*Same day.* A levee at St James's.

*Thursday, April 26* Chatterton's first day in London, and day of the arrival of the news of the Boston riot. - A masquerade at the Opera House, given by the club at Arthur's, present more than 1,200 nobility, ambassadors, &c.

*Same day.*—A bill of indictment found at Hick's Hall against the author or

editor of the *Whisperer*, one of the fiercest of the anti-ministerial periodicals. Warrant for his apprehension issued on the 28th.

*Same evening.*—At Drury-lane, *The Beggar's Opera*, with *The Minor*. Mr. Bannister's benefit.

*Monday, April 30* (fifth day of Chatterton in London).—At Covent-garden, Addison's tragedy of *Cato* revived, with *The Rape of Proserpine*.

*Wednesday, May 2* (Chatterton a week in London).—At Drury-lane, *Hamlet*—the part of Hamlet by Garrick; after which, *Queen Mab*. Benefit night of Signor Grimaldi, Mr. Messenk, and Signor Giorgi.

*Monday, May 7* (the day on which, as above stated, a crowd gathered at the door of the House of Commons on the false idea that Wilkes was to go to the House, and claim his seat).—"Rumour that a lady of high quality would appear that evening at the Soho Masquerade in the character of an Indian princess, most superbly dressed, and with pearls and diamonds to the price of 100,000*l.*; her train to be supported by three black young female slaves, and a canopy to be held over her head by two black male slaves. To be a fine sight."

*Wednesday, May 16.*—"Thirteen convicts executed together at Tyburn, conveyed in five carts; mostly boys, the eldest not being more than twenty-two years of age. Some of them were greatly affected, others appeared hardened."

*Saturday, May 19.*—Parliament prorogued, as stated above.

*Wednesday, May 23.*—The famous interview of the City deputation with the King, at which Beckford made the speech quoted above.

*Saturday, May 26.*—Drury-lane Theatre closed for the season.

*Monday, May 28.*—Covent-garden Theatre closed for the season.

*Same day.*—"At two o'clock, A. M., a fire at the house of Messrs. Webb and Fry, paper-stainers, Holborn-hill, near the end of Shoe-lane; four persons burnt to death."

*Same day 28.*—One of "Junius's" letters in the *Public Advertiser*, containing a view of the state of the country, and a cutting criticism of the conduct of ministers during the session just closed. Only two acknowledged letters of "Junius" appeared during the period of Chatterton's residence in London, and this was one of them.

*Wednesday, May 30.*—"News arrived that a French East Indian ship had reached Toulon, bringing word of a dreadful earthquake at St. Helena, which had entirely sunk the island in the sea."—*Gentleman's Magazine*.

*Thursday, May 31.*—Foundation-stone of Newgate prison laid by the Lord Mayor Beckford.

*All April and May.*—Advertisements of goods, sales, quack medicines, and new books in the newspapers; also paragraphs innumerable on the case of Matthew and Patrick Kennedy, two brothers, tried and condemned to death for the murder of John Bigby, a watchman, but who had obtained a free pardon through the influence of their sister, Miss Kennedy, a celebrated woman of the town, on intimate relations with several high men at Court. An appeal was laid against this settlement of the matter, and a new trial appointed, much to the gratification of the anti-Court party; but Bigby's widow having got 380*l.* to keep out of the way, the trial fell to the ground, and the brothers escaped.

It was into the midst of such incidents as these, episodic as they were to the two great topics of Wilkes and the Constitution and the growing disaffection of the American colonies, that Chatterton transferred himself by his removal from Bristol to London. With some of the little incidents mentioned he may even have come into direct personal contact. If he did not go to see Addison's tragedy of *Cato* at Covent-garden on the 30th of April, it is not likely that he missed

the opportunity of seeing Garrick in *Hamlet* at Drury-lane, on the 2d of May. If the "fine sight" of the lady of high quality with the hundred thousand pounds' worth of jewels about her, and the three young negresses supporting her train, did not tempt him to the vicinity of the Soho Masquerade on the evening of the 7th of May, it is not at all improbable that he formed one of the crowd that gathered round the door of the House of Commons that evening on the false expectation of seeing Wilkes come to make a row, and get himself committed to custody by the Speaker. Even at the distance of Shoreditch the rumour of the thirteen boys hanged at Tyburn on the morning of the 16th of May must have reached him ; for, common as hangings were then, such an occurrence was sufficiently unusual to make some commotion through all London. The prorogation of Parliament on the 19th of the same month would be a matter to interest him ; much more the royal audience given to the City deputation on the 23d, and Beckford's famous speech. Shoe Lane being one of his haunts, the charred ruins of the premises of Messrs. Webb and Fry may very possibly have attracted his notice on the 28th or 29th of May as he passed along Holborn ; and, a daily frequenter as he was of the coffee-houses where the newspapers were to be seen, he is sure to have been one of the earliest and most eager readers of the *Public Advertiser* containing Junius's powerful letter of May the 28th.

Nor is all this mere conjecture. Not only do we know it as a fact that it was part of Chatterton's ambition in coming to London to work himself into connexion with the prominent men and interests of the day, and, above all, with the notable personages of the Wilkes party ; we also know it as a fact that, to some small extent at least, he succeeded in doing so. The evidence of this we shall produce in the next chapter.

### CHAPTER III.

#### SETTING THE THAMES ON FIRE.

CHATTERTON'S London life, as some of our readers must be aware, forms the subject of a brief romance from the pen of

Alfred de Vigny. In that writer's pleasing volume of fiction, entitled "Stello," Chatterton is introduced as the real hero in the story of the so-called Kitty Bell. Kitty Bell is a young married woman, who keeps a pastrycook's shop in the neighbourhood of the Houses of Parliament. Her cakes and confections are celebrated far and wide; and partly from this cause, partly from Kitty's own attractiveness, her shop has become a habitual lounge of the legislators of the country as they pass to and from their duties in St. Stephen's. Kitty, however, is as virtuous as she is pretty; and though her husband is a sulky brute, and the young lords and members of Parliament are very assiduous in buying cakes from her fair fingers, nothing amiss can be said of her. There is one figure, indeed, occasionally seen hovering about the shop, the apparition of which invariably discomposes her, especially when her husband is near. This turns out to be Chatterton, who, having come to London to push his fortune, has, in order to be near the Houses of Parliament, taken a lodging in Kitty Bell's house. Kitty, with her womanly heart, has contrived to dive into her mysterious lodger's secret, and to ascertain that he is a young man of genius engaged in the hopeless task of establishing a connexion with the public men of the day by means of literary service, and, in the meantime, without a penny in his pocket. She does all, in the circumstances, that fear of her brute of a husband will permit. She supplies her lodger furtively with tarts; screens from her husband the fact that he is unable to pay for the garret he occupies; and, in short, through pity and interest, falls at last most foolishly in love with him. Sustained by her kindness and encouragement, Chatterton perseveres in his enterprise, gets acquainted with the Lord Mayor Beckford, and is led to conceive great hopes from the promise of his patronage. Beckford accordingly calls one day at the shop, and, by way of fulfilling his promise, offers to make Chatterton his—footman! Then comes the catastrophe; Chatterton, in despair, commits suicide, and poor Kitty Bell is left to serve out cakes and comfits with a heart no more.

A very pretty story this, with, unfortunately, but one objection to it—that it is not true! The true story of Chatterton's



London life, one would suppose, is to be preferred to the false one ; and as the materials for the true story were before Alfred de Vigny in Chatterton's own letters, it is a pity that he was so fond of fiction as not to pay attention to them. Instead of going to lodge at Kitty Bell's, or at any other conceivable pastrycook's in Westminster, Chatterton, as our readers know, went to lodge at a plasterer's in Shoreditch ; and if Providence was really so kind to him as to supply him with a fair consoler living under the same roof, this, as our readers also know, can possibly, in the first stage of his London career, have been no other than the motherly Mrs. Ballance, or, at best, that hussy, the landlady's niece, to whom he " used sometimes to be saucy." And so with the rest of the facts. The real progress of Chatterton, in his endeavours to make himself known—the real extent of his success in working himself from his centre in Shoreditch into connexion with the metropolitan men and interests of the day, as summarily described in the last chapter—are to be gathered, so far as they can be gathered at all, from his own letters.

Chatterton's second letter to his mother was written on the 6th of May, or after Chatterton had been exactly ten days in London. It is as follows :—

" Shoreditch, London, May 6, 1770.

" DEAR MOTHER, I am surprised that no letter has been sent in answer to my last. I am settled, and in such a settlement as I would desire. I get four guineas a month by one magazine shall engage to write a History of England and other pieces, which will in re than double that sum. Occasional essays for the daily papers would more than support me. What a glorious prospect! Mr. Wilkes knew me by my writings since I first corresponded with the booksellers here. I shall visit him next week, and by his interest will ensure Mrs. Balcanquhall the Trinity House. He affirmed that what Mr. Fell had of mine could not be the writings of a youth, and expressed a desire to know the author. By the means of another bookseller, I shall be introduced to Townshend and Sawbridge. I am quite familiar at the Chapter Coffee-house, and know all the geniuses there. A character is now unnecessary; an author carries his character in his pen. My sister will improve herself in drawing. My grandmother is, I hope, well. Bristol's mercenary walls were never destined to hold me; there, I was out of my element, now, I am in it. London—good God! how superior is London to that despicable place Bristol! Here is none of your little meannesses, none of your mercenary securities, which disgrace that miserable hamlet. Dress, which is in Bristol an eternal fund of scandal, is here only introduced as a subject of praise, if a man dresses well, he has taste, if careless, he has his own reasons for so doing, and is prudent. Need I remind you of the contrast? The poverty of authors is a common observation, but not always a true one. No author can be poor who understands the arts of booksellers; without this necessary knowledge the greatest genius may starve, and with it the greatest dunce live in splendour. This knowledge I have pretty well dipped

into.—The Levant man-of-war, in which T. Wensley went out, is at Portsmouth; but no news of him yet. I lodge in one of Mr. Walmsley's best rooms. Let Mr. Cary copy the letters on the other side, and give them to the persons for whom they are designed, if not too much labour for him.

"I remain, yours, &c.

"T. CHATTERTON.

"P.S.—I have some trifling presents for my mother, sister, Thorne, &c."

[Here follow the letters to various Bristol acquaintances, which Mr. Cary was to copy out and give them]:—

"*Mr. T. Cary.*—I have sent you a task—I hope no unpleasing one. Tell all your acquaintances for the future to read the *Freeholder's Magazine*. When you have anything for publication, send it to me, and it shall most certainly appear in some periodical compilation. Your last piece was, by the ignorance of a corrector, jumbled under the 'considerations' in the acknowledgments, but I rescued it, and insisted on its appearance. Your friend

"T. C.

"Direct for me, to be left at the Chapter Coffee-house, Paternoster-row."

"*Mr. Henry Kator.*—If you have not forgot Lady Betty, any complaint, rebus, or enigma, on the dear charmer, directed for me, to be left at the Chapter Coffee-house, Paternoster-row, shall find a place in some magazine or other, as I am engaged in many. Your friend,

"T. CHATTERTON."

"*Mr. Wm. Smith.*—When you have any poetry for publication, send it to me, to be left at the Chapter Coffee-house, Paternoster-row, and it shall most certainly appear. Your friend,

"T. C."

"*Mrs. Baker.*—The sooner I see you the better. Send me, as soon as possible, Rymsdyk's address." (Mr. Cary will leave this at Mr. Flower's, Small-street.)

"*Mr. Mason.*—Give me a short prose description of the situation of Nash; and the poetic addition shall appear in some magazine. Send me also whatever you would have published, and direct for me, to be left at the Chapter Coffee-house, Paternoster-row. Your friend,

"T. CHATTERTON."

"*Mr. Matthew Mease.*—Begging Mr. Mease's pardon for making public use of his name lately, I hope he will remember me, and tell all his acquaintance to read the *Freeholder's Magazine* for the future.

"T. CHATTERTON."

"Tell Mr. Thaire, Mr. Gaster, Mr. A. Broughton, Mr. J. Broughton, Mr. Williams, Mr. Rudhall, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Carty, Mr. Hanmor, Mr. Vaughan, Mr. Ward, Mr. Kalo, Mr. Smith, &c. &c., to read the *Freeholder's Magazine*."

This is certainly pretty well after only ten days in London. We fear, indeed, that there is a good deal of bragging in the letter, intended to convey to his Bristol acquaintances a more favourable impression of the progress he had already made in the great metropolis than the facts, as known to himself, exactly warranted. Still, it is evident that Chatterton, when he wrote the letter, was in high spirits. Reducing the expressions of the letter to the real substance of fact, on which, as it

seems to us, they may have been founded, we should be inclined to say that the information here given respecting the extent of Chatterton's success in introducing himself to notice during his first ten days in London, amounts to something like this:—Being a young fellow of prepossessing appearance and address, and having, as we know, a sufficiently good opinion of himself to prevent any of that awkwardness in meeting strangers which arises from excessive modesty, he had made the best use he could of the slight hold he had on Fell, Hamilton, Edmunds, and Dodsley; had gone to their places of business perhaps oftener than they cared to see him; had talked with them, made proposals of literary assistance to them, compelled them into saying something that could be construed as encouragement; had got from them hints as to other quarters in which he could apply; had probably, by their advice, turned his hopes towards the great book-mart of Paternoster Row, where all sorts of speculations he might help in were going on; and had thus at last found himself referred to that celebrated place of resort for the booksellers of the day and their literary workmen, the Chapter Coffee-house. Mr. Peter Cunningham, in his *Handbook of London*, has provided us with an extract relative to this once famous rendezvous, which will serve to give us a more distinct idea of it as it was in Chatterton's time; and, the house being still extant, those who desire to perfect this idea by acquaintance with it in its present condition, may do so at the expense of a mutton-chop any afternoon they are in the neighbourhood of St. Paul's.

“And here my publisher would not forgive me, was I to leave the neighbourhood without taking notice of the Chapter Coffee-house, which is frequented by those encouragers of literature and (as they are styled by an eminent critic) ‘not the worst judges of merit,’ the booksellers. The conversation here naturally turns upon the newest publications; but their criticisms are somewhat singular. When they say a *good* book, they do not mean to praise the style or sentiment, but the quick and extensive sale of it. That book is best which sells most; and if the demand for Quarles should be greater than for Pope, he would have the highest place on the rubric-post.”—*The Connoisseur*, No. 1, Jan. 31st, 1754.

Here, then, among the talking groups of booksellers, we are to fancy Chatterton a daily visitor during the first week or two of his stay in town—reading the newspapers, listening to the conversation, getting acquainted with “the geniuses”

of the place, and giving very small orders to the waiters. The Chapter Coffee-house was evidently a great place in his eyes, and every shilling spent in it he probably regarded as a good investment. All his Bristol friends were to address their letters to him there, and not to his lodging at Shoreditch.

More particularly, however, Chatterton's hopes at the period of his first settlement in London, seem to have rested on the intimacy he had struck up with Mr. Fell. We have already communicated to the reader our impression of this personage, as a gentleman in pecuniary difficulties, connected in some way with Wilkes, and employing his own broken energies, and the capital of other people, in the publication of the *Freeholder's Magazine*. His reception of Chatterton, we have said, seems to have been, and probably from the state of his own circumstances, more frank and cordial than that of any other of the booksellers Chatterton called upon. A kind of mutual understanding seems, indeed, to have been at once established between them. On the one hand, as we guess, Chatterton was to have the pages of the *Freeholder's Magazine* thrown open to him; on the other hand, Fell, to whom the service of a clever contributor on any other terms than those of hard cash, was probably a great convenience, was willing to remunerate his young friend with plenty of promises, and in the meantime with the benefits of his advice and countenance, and as much praise as he liked. The prospect of being introduced to Wilkes was, it would appear, the most attractive bait that could be held out to Chatterton; and we greatly fear Fell made the most of the fact. "I assure you, Mr. Chatterton, Mr. Wilkes has a high opinion of you; he has more than once asked me about writings of yours; and when I told him that you were not eighteen, 'Upon my soul I don't believe it, Mr. Fell,' said he; 'so young a man could not write like that:' these were his very words." Such, as we infer from Chatterton's own account, was the substance of much of his conversation with Fell. How much of sincerity there was in the farther promise on the part of Fell, that he would introduce Chatterton to Wilkes, we can hardly say. There is, certainly, some bragging in the manner in which

Chatterton announces the promised introduction to his mother, "I shall visit him (Wilkes) next week, and, by his interest, will ensure Mrs. Ballance the Trinity House;" (i.e. the charitable allowance granted out of the funds of this foundation to the widows of deserving seamen.) Chatterton, we fully believe, had shrewdness enough, with all his inexperience and his good opinion of himself, to know that he was putting a little strain on the truth here. And so also, probably, in the matter of the other proposed introduction to the two popular aldermen, Townshend and Sawbridge. Still, it is evident that he had some trust in Fell. To read the *Freeholder's Magazine*, and to address his letters to the Chapter Coffee-house, in Paternoster Row, were his two injunctions to his friends at home after he had been ten days in London.

What came of the connexion so rapidly formed with Fell and the *Freeholder's Magazine*, will be seen from Chatterton's next letter. It is to his mother:—

"King's Bench, for the present, May 14, 1770.

"DEAR MADAM, Don't be surprised at the name of the place. I am not here as a prisoner. Matters go on swimmingly. Mr Fell having offended certain persons, they have set his creditors upon him, and he is safe in the King's Bench. I have been bothered by this accident his successors in the *Freeholder's Magazine*, knowing nothing of the matter, will be glad to engage me on my own terms. Mr Edmunds has been tried before the House of Lords, sentenced to pay a fine, and thrown into Newgate. His misfortunes will be to me of no little service. Last week, being in the pit of Drury Lane theatre [it might have been to see Garrick again], I contracted an immediate acquaintance (which you know is no hard task to me) with a young gentleman in Cheapside, partner in a music-shop, the greatest in the city. Hearing I could write, he desired me to write a few songs for him, this I did the same night, and conveyed them to him the next morning. These he showed to a Doctor in music, and I am invited to treat with the Doctor, on the footing of a composer for Ranelagh and the Gardens. 'Bravo, hey boys, up we go!' Besides the advantage of visiting these expensive and polite places gratis, my vanity will be fed with the sight of my name in copper-plate, and my sister will receive a bundle of printed songs, the words by her brother. These are not all my acquisitions. A gentleman who knows me at the 'Chapter,' as an author, would have introduced me as a companion to the young Duke of Northumberland, in his intended general tour. But alas! I speak no tongue but my own.

But to return once more to a place I am sickened to write of, Bristol. [Here follows some references to Mr Lantert, and a 'clearance' from the apprenticeship to be obtained from him.] I will get some patterns worth your acceptance, and wish you and my sister would improve yourselves in drawing, as it is here a valuable and never-failing acquisition. My box shall be attended to, I hope my books are in it. If not, send them and particularly Cutcott's Hutchinsonian jargon on the Deluge, and the MS. glossary, composed of one small book annexed to a larger. My sister will remember me to Miss Sandford. I have not quite forgot her; though there are so many pretty milliners, &c.



hat I have almost forgot myself. [There are similar remembrances, and messages to Mr. Cary; to Miss Rumsey, who seems to be intending a journey to London, and is requested to send Chatterton her address, if she does come, as 'London is not Bristol,' and they 'may patrol the town for a day without raising one whisper or nod of scandal;' to Miss Baker, Miss Porter, Miss Singer, Miss Webb, and Miss Thatcher, who is assured that 'if he is not in love with her, he is in love with nobody else;' to Miss Love, on whose name he is going to write a song; to Miss Cotton, 'begging her pardon for whatever has happened to offend her, and telling her he did not give her this assurance when in Bristol lest it should seem like an attempt to avoid the anger of her *furious* brother;' finally to Miss Watkins, assuring her 'that the letter she has made herself ridiculous by was never intended for her, but for another young lady in the same neighbourhood, of the same name.' Chatterton also asks his sister to send him 'a journal of all the transactions of the females within the circle of their acquaintance.'] I promised, before my departure, to write to some hundreds, I believe; but what with writing for publications and going to places of public diversion, which is as absolutely necessary to me as food, I find but little time to write to *you*. As to Mr. Barrett, Mr. Catcott, Mr. Burgum, &c. &c., they rate literary lumber so low, that I believe an author, in their estimation, must be poor indeed. But here matters are otherwise; had Rowley been a Londoner, instead of a Bristowyan, I could have lived by copying his works. . . . My youthful acquaintances will not take in dudgeon, that I do not write oftener to them; but as I had the happy art of pleasing in conversation, my company was often liked where I did not like; and to continue a correspondence under such circumstances would be ridiculous. Let my sister improve in copying music, drawing, and everything which requires genius: in Bristol's mercantile style those things may be useless, if not a detriment to her; but here they are highly profitable. [A few additional messages to Bristol friends follow, together with a hope that his grandmother 'enjoys the state of health he left her in,' and an intimation, apparently in connexion with Mrs. Ballance's business, that he had 'intended waiting on the Duke of Bedford relative to the Trinity House; but his Grace is dangerously ill.']

"Monday evening.

"THOMAS CHATTERTON.

"Direct to me at Mr. Walmsley's, at Shoreditch—*only*."

To this letter succeeds one written to his sister, dated May the 30th, from Tom's Coffee-house—a house in Devereux Court, Strand, and hardly inferior to the Chapter Coffee-house as a place of resort for wits and men of letters.

"Tom's Coffee-house, London, May 30, 1770.

"DEAR SISTER,—There is such a noise of business and politics in the room, that any inaccuracy in writing here is highly excusable. My present profession obliges me to frequent places of the best resort. To begin with what every female conversation begins with—dress: I employ my money now in fitting myself fashionably, and getting into good company. This last article always brings me in interest. But I have engaged to live with a gentleman, the brother of a lord, (a Scotch one, indeed,) who is going to advance pretty deeply into the bookselling branches. I shall have board and lodging, genteel and elegant, gratis: this article, in the quarter of the town he lives, with worse accommodations, would be 50*l.* per annum. I shall have likewise no inconsiderable premium; and assure yourself every month shall end to your advantage. I will send you two silks this summer; and expect, in answer to this, what colours you prefer. My mother shall not be forgotten. My employment will be writing a voluminous History of London, to appear in numbers, the beginning of next winter. As this will not, like writing political essays, oblige me to go to the coffee-house, I shall be able to serve you the more by it; but it will necessitate me to go to Oxford, Cambridge, Lincoln, Coventry, and every Collegiate Church near—not at all disagreeable journeys, and not to me



expensive. The manuscript glossary I mentioned in my last must not be omitted. If money flowed as fast upon me as honours, I would give you a portion of 5,000*l*. You have, doubtless, heard of the Lord Mayor's remonstrating and addressing the King ; but it will be a piece of news to inform you that *I* have been with the Lord Mayor on the occasion. Having addressed an essay to his Lordship, it was very well received—perhaps better than it deserved ; and I waited on his Lordship to have his approbation to address a second letter to him, on the subject of the remonstrance and its reception. His Lordship received me as politely as a citizen could, and warmly invited me to call on him again. The rest is a secret.—But the Devil of the matter is, there is no money to be got on this side of the question. Interest is on the other side. But he is a poor author who cannot write on both sides. I believe I may be introduced (and if I am not, I'll introduce myself) to a ruling power in the Court party. I might have a recommendation to Sir George Colebrook, an East India Director, as qualified for an office no-ways despicable ; but I shall not take a step to the sea whilst I can continue on land. I went yesterday to Woolwich to see Mr. Wensley : he is paid to-day. The artillery is no unpleasant sight, if we bar reflection, and do not consider how much mischief it may do. Greenwich Hospital and St. Paul's Cathedral are the only structures which could reconcile me to anything out of the Gothic. [Here are some messages to Mr. Carty about Mrs. Carty, who is ill, advising him to 'leech her temples plentifully, and keep her very low in diet, and as much in the dark as possible ;' also to Miss Sandford, to Miss Thatcher, and to Miss Rumsey, whom he 'thanks for her complimentary expression' in reply to his last message ; though, as she does not say whether she is coming to London or not, he thinks it 'unsatisfactory.'] Essay-writing has this advantage—you are sure of constant pay ; and when you have once wrote a piece which makes the author inquired after, you may bring the booksellers to your own terms. Essays on the patriotic side fetch no more than what the copy is sold for. As the patriots themselves are searching for a place, they have no gratuities to spare. So says one of the beggars in a temporary alteration of mine in the *Jovial Crew* :—

'A patriot was my occupation ;  
 It got me a name, but no pelf ;  
 Till, starved for the good of the nation,  
 I begg'd for the good of myself.  
Fal, lal, &c.

'I told them, if 'twas not for me  
 Their freedoms would all go to pot ;  
 I promised to set them all free,  
 But never a farthing I got.  
Fal, lal, &c.'

"On the other hand, unpopular essays will not even be accepted, and you must pay to have them printed ; but then you seldom lose by it. Courtiers are so sensible of their deficiency in merit, that they generally reward all who know how to daub them with the appearance of it. To return to private affairs ; Friend Slude may depend upon my endeavouring to find the publications you mention. They publish the *Gospel Magazine* here. For a whim, I write for it. I believe there are not any sent to Bristol ; they are hardly worth the carriage—methodistical and unmeaning. With the usual ceremonies to my mother and grandmother, and sincerely, without ceremony, wishing them both happy—when it is in my power to make them so, it shall be so—and with my kind remembrance to Miss Webb and Miss Thorne, I remain, as I ever was,

"Yours, &c., to the end of the chapter,

"THOMAS CHATTERTON.

"P.S.—I am this moment pierced through the heart by the black eye of a young lady, driving along in a hackney-coach. I am quite in love ; if my love lasts till that time, you shall hear of it in my next."

After this letter, there is a blank in the correspondence, so far as it has been preserved, for three weeks. During these three weeks, we are now able to say, an event of some importance in Chatterton's London life took place—to wit, a change of lodging. It has hitherto been assumed by his biographers that he remained in his original lodgings, at Mr. Walmsley's, in Shoreditch, till the first week of July. This assumption, even according to the evidence which the biographers who have made it had before them, was hardly pardonable; for one of Chatterton's published poems, which bears the date of June 12, is dated also from the new place of lodging which he is known to have occupied during the latter portion of his residence in the metropolis. Other evidence, which has only recently been made accessible, confirms the accuracy of this date, and proves that he must have left Mr. Walmsley's in the early part of the month of June.

From the very first, it may be imagined, he regarded Mr. Walmsley's as only a temporary residence, convenient until he found a better. The economy of Mr. Walmsley's house was probably by no means to his taste. To have to share a bedroom with Master Walmsley, and to be continually in contact with the various inmates of the plasterer's house, more especially Mrs. Ballance, who would persist in calling him "Cousin Tommy," must have been disagreeable to him on more accounts than one. Besides, had there been no other reason for a change, the distance of Shoreditch from the publishing-offices, where he had to make his calls, and from the coffee-houses and other places of resort which he believed himself bound to frequent, would have been a sufficient one. Accordingly, as soon as he began to see his way clear to future employment, he determined quietly to seek another lodging. During the first week of June we may fancy him going about on the search through all the likely streets that take his fancy within a moderate radius from Paternoster Row. At last, some afternoon, going up Holborn towards the West End, after calling at the office of the *Middlesex* in Shoe Lane, he is caught by the appearance of Brooke Street, a tidy, quiet-looking street, striking off from Holborn on the right, a little

on the City-side of Gray's Inn Lane. He turns aside from Holborn into this street, sees perhaps various tickets of "Rooms to let" hung up in the windows; but, on the whole, likes best one particular house so distinguished, on the door of which he sees the name of "Mrs. Angell, Sack-maker." (The term "sack-maker," from "sack" or "sac"—the older naturalized French name of one portion of feminine attire, which we now render by another—was then equivalent, or nearly so, to our term "dress-maker.") At the door of this house, after sufficient inspection of it from the outside, he knocks rather loudly. The knock is answered, probably by Mrs. Angell herself—a pleasant-looking person, as we fancy, of between forty and fifty years of age. He states his object; is shown various rooms, all unlet, of which he may have his choice; and in the end bargains for one, which is both bedroom and sitting-room, situated almost at the top of the house, immediately "under the garret," but with the window to the front. Thither, either the same day or within a day or two, he removes his things, alleging no reason either to Mrs. Walmsley or to Mrs. Ballance, as they afterwards told Sir Herbert Croft, for his leaving them so suddenly. On cleaning up the room he had occupied, after he was gone, they found the floor "covered with little pieces of paper, the remains of his poetings." It seems, however, that he did not all at once cease his visits at Walmsley's house, but for some time at least continued to call there in the course of the day.

If the tradition is correct, one may yet identify the actual house in Brooke Street, Holborn, where Mrs. Angell lived, and where, after the first week of June, 1770, Chatterton had his lodging. Mr. Peter Cunningham, whose authority in all such matters is the best that can be had, states in his *Handbook of London* that the house was No. 4, Brooke Street. If so, then it was at the better end of the street, and was the fourth of those houses, counting from Holborn, on the right hand, which having been formed into one range of premises in 1789, by Mr. Oldham, a stove and grate manufacturer, are now occupied, in the same connected fashion, by an extensive furniture dealer, whose main-door is in Holborn. The house,

with the rest of the corner-block so tenanted, is conspicuously visible, it ought to be known, to the outside passengers of every omnibus going down Holborn towards the City. The tradition has clung about this house; and the outer aspect corresponds. The houses in the block are all old; and though, in consequence of their union into one range of premises, the separate doors towards Brooke Street, as well as the separate partition-walls on the lower stories, have disappeared, the upper windows retain a look of eighty years ago. Nor have any houses in the street such distinct sub-garrets. Standing on the same side of the street, you count but four stories, and think these make the houses high enough; but when you cross to the other side, you see that the roof slants off very obtusely above the fourth row of windows, so as to afford room for another nearly perpendicular row among the tiles, under the true garrets. In one of these rooms, if our present notion is correct, Chatterton had his abode. And a far more cheerful lodging, in external respects, it must have been than the one he had left at Shoreditch—high above most of the houses, with the airy heaven above, and a prospect of roofs and chimneys round, and yet, if he chose to stretch a little over the window, a sight of Brooke Street below and the thoroughfare of Holborn to the left. The street was respectable itself, with good enough shops in it; and only at the inner end—where it widens into a little irregular space, and bends off into alleys, affording room for a small shabby market for meat, vegetables, and the like, known in the neighbourhood as Brooke Market—did it lead into questionable purlieus.

We should not perhaps have been so particular in describing the place, but that, in Chatterton's very next letter, there is a description of the street in one of its nocturnal aspects, which might not otherwise be so intelligible. This letter, which is dated the 19th of June, has hitherto been necessarily supposed to have been written at Shoreditch; but it is in itself, if well attended to by those who know the topography of London, an additional proof that he had already quitted that neighbourhood. It was written,

we calculate, a week or ten days after he had gone to lodge at Mrs. Angell's.

“ June 19, 1770.

“ DEAR SISTER,—I have an horrid cold. The relation of the manner of my catching it may give you more pleasure than the circumstance itself. As I wrote very late Sunday night (or, rather, very early Monday morning) I thought to have gone to bed pretty soon last night; when, being half undressed, I heard a very doleful voice singing Miss Hill's favourite Bedlamite song. The hum-drum of the voice so struck me, that, though I was obliged to listen a long while before I could hear the words, I found the similitude in the sound. After hearing her, with pleasure, drawl for about half-an-hour, she jumped into a brisker tune; and hobbled out the ever-famous song in which poor Jack Fowler was to have been satirized. ‘I put my hand into a bush,’ ‘I pricked my finger to the bone,’ ‘I saw a ship sailing along,’ ‘I thought the sweetest flowers to find,’ and other pretty flowery expressions, were twanged with no inharmonious bray. I now ran to the window, and threw up the sash, resolved to be satisfied whether or no it was the identical Miss Hill *in propria persona*. But alas! it was a person whose twang is very well known when she is awake, but who had drunk so much royal bob (the gingerbread-baker for that, you know!) that she was now singing herself asleep. This somnifying liquor had made her voice so like the sweet echo of Miss Hill's, that if I had not imagined that she could not see her way up to London, I should absolutely have imagined it hers. [Here, for some lines, the letter is hardly legible; but Chatterton seems to say that in the street under his window he saw, besides the singer, a fellow loitering about in bad female company; which fellow he had again, that very morning, on his return from ‘Marybone Gardens,’ seen in custody ‘at the watch-house in the parish of St. Giles.’ He then describes a third figure who completed the picturesque street-group, as follows:] A drunken fisherman, who sells souse mackarel and other delicious dainties, to the eternal detriment of all two-penny ordinaries—as his best commodity, his salmon, goes off at three halfpence the piece—this itinerant merchant, this moveable fish-stall, having likewise had his dose of bob-royal, stood still for a while, and then joined chorus in a tone which would have laid half-a-dozen lawyers, pleading for their fees, fast asleep. This naturally reminded me of Mr. Haythorne's song of

‘Says Plato, who-oy-oy-oy should man be vain?’

“ However, my entertainment, though sweet enough in itself, has a dish of sour sauce served up in it; for I have a most horrible wheezing in the throat. But I don't repent that I have this cold; for there are so many nostrums here, that 'tis worth a man's while to get a distemper, he can be cured so cheap.”

Chatterton does not despatch this letter immediately, but keeps it by him for ten days, when he adds a postscript as follows:—

“ June 29th, 1770.—My cold is over and gone. If the above did not recall to your mind some sense of laughter, you have lost your ideas of risibility.”

The letter *may* have made his sister laugh, as was intended; but on us, at this distance of time, the impression is very different. We remember a passage in *Pepys's Diary* which struck us perhaps more than anything else in that entertaining book. It was a passage describing an excursion which

Pepys and some companions belonging to the Navy-office made down the river Thames. They returned at night, when it was pitch dark, making their way slowly and with much trepidation along the middle of the river as near as they could guess, and hailing the moored craft that they passed, in order to ascertain their whereabouts. Not a soul, however, seemed to be awake on the whole river, to answer their cries ; and the only sound they could hear was that of a dog incessantly barking somewhere, either on the south side of the river, or on board of some vessel left to his charge. The barking of that dog has been in our ears ever since ; intimating, as it were, with a kind of ghastly vividness, which none of all Pepys's other commemorations, though they are vivid enough, can match, that those old days of Pepys really and authentically were, that the black river flowed then at night, and that a world of now defunct life alternately roared and reposed on its banks. And so with this last-quoted letter of Chatterton. As we read it we are in Brooke Street, Holborn, on a summer night eighty-six years ago. And what do we see ? A wretched, drunken woman passing from side to side in the faint light, and disturbing the deserted street with snatches of song ; after a while, a male costermonger, also drunk, reeling out from some neighbouring obscurity, and, caught by the music, joining it on his own account with a stentorian bass ; and meantime, standing at a corner, indifferently looking on, a hulking figure of " the dangerous class," who completes the trio. And is this all ? Hist ! An upper window in one of the houses, in which the light has not yet been put out, is thrown up, and the head and face of a young man emerge ; a wonderful head and face, if we could see them, the face pale, under dark clustering hair, and the eye a bold and burning grey. He leans out, surveys the street group far below, seems interested ; and with his face resting on his two hands, and his elbows resting on the window-sill, he remains gazing out half-an-hour or more. O month of June, 1770 ! and is this the kind of educating circumstance you provide for Chatterton, solitary in his London lodging, and alert in his solitude for objects to occupy



his eyes, and incite him to new trains of thought? A poor sleeping street, and a serenade of two drunkards! No; as he gazes, the drunkards reel out of view into other streets, their voices growing fainter as they go; the hulking fellow at the corner also moves off, destiny guiding him along Holborn to St. Giles's watch-house; the street then, though still the same narrow and poor one, is swept at least of its human degradation; the mood of the gazer changes also; and though he remains still gazing, it is not at the street any longer, but at the soft summer stars!

One letter more closes the series of those sent by Chatterton to Bristol during his first two months in London. It is addressed to his friend T. Cary, and bears no date. From some allusions in the letter, however, we are able to say with tolerable certainty that it was written on June 29th or 30th, the day before the June magazine-day. A considerable part of the letter is taken up with an answer to some objections which Cary had made to a panegyric of Chatterton's on Mr. Allen, the organist of Bristol, at the expense of his brother organist Mr. Broderip. The panegyric is undoubtedly that contained in the long poem called *Kew Gardens*, written before Chatterton had left Bristol, and still unpublished, but which Cary had, it seems, just been reading in manuscript:—

“What charms has music, when great Broderip sweats  
To torture sound to what his brother sets!  
With scraps of ballad-tunes, and *gude Scotch sangs*,  
Which god-like Ramsay to his bagpipe twangs;  
With tatter'd fragments of forgotten plays;  
With Playford's melody to Sternhold's lays;  
This pipe of science, mighty Broderip comes,  
And a strange, unconnected jumble thrums.  
Roused to devotion in a sprightly air,  
Danced into piety, and jigg'd to prayer,  
A modern hornpipe's murder greets our ears,  
The heavenly music of domestic spheres;  
The flying band in swift transition hops  
Through all the tortured, vile burlesque of stops.  
Sacred to sleep, in superstition's key,  
Dull, doleful diapasons die away;  
Sleep spreads his silken wings, and, lull'd by sound,  
The vicar slumbers, and the snore goes round;  
Whilst Broderip at his passive organ groans  
Through all his slow variety of tones.  
How unlike Allen! Allen is divine.  
His touch is sentimental, tender, fine;

No little affectations e'er disgraced  
 His more refined, his sentimental taste ;  
 He keeps the passions with the sound in play,  
 And the soul trembles with the trembling key."

Cary, probably in a letter sent after Chatterton to London, had objected to this as too partial to Allen, and as unfair to Broderip. Chatterton, premising that he believes "there are very few in Bristol who know what music is," defends his comparative estimate of the two organists, and reiterates his praise of Allen in strong terms, and his contempt for his rival. "I am afraid, my dear friend," he says, "you do not understand the merit of a full piece ; if you did, you would confess to me that Allen is the only organist you have in Bristol." He then continues :—

"A song of mine is a great favourite with the town, on account of the fulness of the music. It has much of Mr. Allen's manner in the air. You will see that and twenty more in print, after the season is over. I yesterday heard several airs of my burletta sung to the harpsichord, horns, bassoons, hautboys, violins, &c., and will venture to pronounce, from the excellence of the music, that it will take with the town. Observe, I write in all the magazines. I am surprised you took no notice of the last *London*. In that and the magazine coming out to-morrow are the only two pieces I have the vanity to call poetry. Mind the *Political Register*. I am very intimately acquainted with the editor, who is also editor of another publication. You will find not a little of mine in the *London Museum*, and *Town and Country*. The printers of the daily publications are all frightened out of their patriotism, and will take nothing unless 'tis moderate or ministerial. I have not had five patriotic essays this fortnight. All must be ministerial or entertaining. I remain yours, &c.

"T. CHATTERTON."

We have presented the last four letters in their series, with no other remarks than were necessary to make their meaning clear.\* It is obvious, however, that if we are to ascertain the real coherent story of Chatterton's London-life during the two months they include, *i. e.*, during the six or seven weeks of his residence at Shoreditch, and the first two or three of his residence in Brooke Street, we must go over the ground for ourselves, weaving the facts together, along with others independently known, and allowing for his exaggerations.

In the first place then, we repeat, there is abundant evidence that Chatterton's activity during his first two months

\* All the letters of Chatterton contained in this chapter, with the exception of that to Cary, were first collected and printed by Sir Herbert Croft in his *Love and Madness* ; from the second edition of which, published in 1786, we have taken them.

in London, his perseverance in introducing himself and trying to form connexions, was something unparalleled. Very few young men of his age, we believe, would have gone through this preliminary part of the business with half the courage and self-assurance which he showed. We believe him to have been capable of ringing at any number of bells, and sending in his card, known or unknown, to any number of persons, in the course of a forenoon; and we sometimes wonder at how many of all the doors in London he did actually present himself during his stay there. Fell, Edmunds, Hamilton, and Dodsley, as we have said, were the persons he began with; but he soon added to the circle of those whom he favoured with his calls, others, and still others. That he might the more easily carry out his plan of getting acquainted with people likely to be of use to him, he went daily to the Chapter Coffee-house, Tom's Coffee-house, and the like places of resort; entering, we doubt not, into conversation with many who gave him short answers, and wondered who in the world he was. Considering how these places were frequented, there may have been many of the men of note at that time in London who had, in this way, seen Chatterton without knowing it. "I am quite familiar," he says in his letter of the 6th of May, "at the Chapter Coffee-house, and know all the geniuses there." One notes, however, that in his postscript to his next letter, of May 14th, he retracts the direction he had given to his mother and his friends to address to him at the Chapter, and bids them address him "at Mr. Wahnsley's, Shoreditch, only." Had he received any rebuff at the Chapter, which made him discontinue the house? If so, there were other coffee-houses besides Tom's. The theatres, too, and other places of amusement served his purpose. By the 28th of May, indeed, as we have seen, both Drury Lane and Covent Garden were closed for the season; but during the preceding month he had no doubt visited both several times, at once enjoying the play, and, as on the occasion he mentions in his letter of the 14th, picking up friends in the pit. After the great theatres were closed, there were still some minor ones, as well as

Ranelagh Gardens and Marylebone Gardens, where there was music and other entertainment; and there, too, Chatterton occasionally paid his half-crown, flattering himself it was an investment.

So much for the *effort* made; next as to the *success*. Making every allowance for his own exaggerations, we believe it to have been by no means inconsiderable. Let us see.

His great object evidently after his first arrival in London, was to distinguish himself as a political writer on the "patriotic" or Opposition side. This was to be his short cut to fame and wealth. To write such letters for the *Middlesex Journal*, the *Freeholder's Magazine*, and other Opposition papers, as should rival those of Junius, and make himself be inquired after by the heads of the party, and so put forward and provided for—this was the immediate form of his ambition. Fell and Edmunds were here his chief reliance; but, above all, he desired to be introduced to Wilkes. Could that be done, his fortune would be made! And Fell, as we have seen, was to manage it for him. Unfortunately, when the promised time came, Fell was not in a position to keep his promise, having been laid up in the King's Bench for debt, where Chatterton visits him. Edmunds, too, was put out of reach about the same time, having been made an example of by the Government, and thrown into Newgate, by way of warning to "patriotic" publishers. The incarceration of these two friends of Chatterton at the very time when he was expecting so much from them, must, one would think, have been a misfortune. But he represents it otherwise. The *Freeholder* had only gone into other hands, and he should be able to write for it yet, on even better terms than if Fell had remained editor! The *Middlesex Journal*, too, was still to go on (Hamilton of the *Town and Country Magazine* had come to the rescue, and taken it up); so that here also he should be no worse off than before! Nor were these anticipations falsified. For the *Freeholder* indeed, he does not appear to have written much after this date; the only subsequent contribution to its pages that can with toler-

able certainty be traced to him, being a letter, in the Junius style, to the Premier, Lord North, which was not published till the August number. But for the *Middlesex*, under Hamilton, he continued to write busily. At least five letters have been disinterred from the columns of this old newspaper, all printed in the month of May, 1770, and which there is good reason to believe were Chatterton's.\* They are all signed "Decimus." The first, published May 10th, is addressed to the Earl of H — h (Hillsborough, Minister for the American colonies); the second, published May 15th, is to the P — — D — — of W — — (i. e., the Princess Dowager of Wales); the third, published May 22nd, is to the Prime Minister himself; the fourth, published May 26th, is not a letter, but a kind of squib, proposing a series of subjects for an exhibition of sign-board paintings; and the last is a letter "to the Freeholders of the city of Bristol," bidding them shake off their lethargy, and imitate the glorious example of London. We quote a sample or two of these effusions.

*From the Letter to the Earl of Hillsborough, May 10.*—"My Lord,—If a constant exercise of tyranny and cruelty has not steeled your heart against all sensations of compunction and remorse, permit me to remind you of the recent massacre in Boston. It is an infamous attribute of the ministry of the Thane, that what his tools begin in secret fraud and oppression ends in murder and avowed assassination. Not contented to deprive us of our liberty, they rob us of our lives, knowing, from a sad experience, that the one without the other is an insupportable burden. Your Lordship has bravely distinguished yourself among the ministers of the present reign. Whilst North and the instruments of his royal mistress settled the plan of operation, it was your part to execute, you were the assassin whose knife was ever ready to finish the crime. If every feeling of humanity is not extinct in you, reflect, for a moment reflect, on the horrid task you undertook and perpetrated. Think of the injury you have done to your country, which nothing but the dissolution of a Parliament, not representing the people, can erase. . . . Think of the recent murders at Boston. O my Lord! however you may force a smile into your countenance, however you may trifle in the train of dissipation, your conscience must raise a hell within," &c. &c.

*From the Letter to the Princess Dowager of Wales, May 15.* . . . "I could wish your R — H — — would know how to act worthy your situation in life, and not debase yourself by mingling with a group of ministers, the most detestable that ever embroiled a kingdom in discord and commotion. Your consequence in the Council can arise only from your power over His M — y; and that power you possess but by the courtesy of an unaccountable infatuation. Filial duty has nothing to do with the question—a king has no mother, no wife, no friend, considered as a king. His country, his subjects, are the only objects of his public concern." . . .

\* These letters were first reprinted from the *Middlesex Journal*, by Mr. Dix, in his *Life of Chatterton*.



*From the Letter to the Premier, May 22. . . .* "Fly to the Council, with your face whitened with fear; tell them that justice is at the door, and the axe will do its office; tell them that whilst the spirit of English freedom exists, vengeance has also an existence; and when Britons are denied justice from the powers who have the trust of their rights, the Constitution hath given them a power to do themselves justice."

*From the Squib describing an Exhibition of Sign-paintings, May 26. . .* "No. 3. 'The Union:.' An Englishman sleeping and a Scotchman picking his pocket—'The K——;' a sign for a button-maker. The painter, who has not fixed his design to this performance, is certainly a very loyal subject. His M—— has that innocent vacancy of countenance which distinguishes the representation of angels and cherubims; without guilt, without meaning, without everything but an undesigning simplicity." . . .

*From the Letter to the Freeholders of Bristol, May 26.* "Gentlemen,—As a fellow-citizen, I presume to address you on a subject which I hoped would have animated an abler pen. At this critical situation, when the fate of the Constitution depends upon the exertion of an English spirit, I confess my astonishment at finding you silent. The second city in England should not be ashamed to copy the first in any laudable measure. . . . Remember the speech of the glorious Canynge, in whose repeated mayoralties honour and virtue were not unknown in the corporation. When the unhappy dissensions first broke out between the houses of Lancaster and York, he immediately declared himself for the latter. His lady, fearful of the consequences, begged him to desist and not ruin himself and family. 'My family,' replied the brave citizen, 'is dear to me—Heaven can witness how dear! But when discord and oppressions begin to distract the realm, my country is my family; and *that* it is my duty to protect.' "

These few samples will show how well Chatterton had caught the trick of the Opposition politics of the day, and how expertly he could dress up the popular commonplaces. That his contributions, such as they were, were thought of some value by the conductors of the *Middlesex Journal* is proved by the fact that there was one of them in at least every alternate number during the whole month of May, and that two or three of them are printed in what would be considered the chief place in the paper.

But Chatterton was not content with writing only for the *Middlesex*. He probably tried others of the Opposition newspapers, including even the great *Public Advertiser* itself, which Junius had made illustrious. Then, as we shall see, there were various Magazines or Monthlies, besides the *Freeholder*, to which he sent more elaborate contributions in the same political strain for publication at the end of the month, or whenever else they appeared. Of these, one was the *Political Register*. "Mind the *Political Register*," he says to his friend Cary in the end of June: "I am very intimately acquainted with the editor, who is also editor of another pub-



lication." The acquaintance had probably commenced before the end of May; and it is with the circumstance of his writing for this periodical that we are disposed to connect the story of his introduction to Beckford, as related by himself to his sister in his letter of the 30th of that month. The facts seem to be as follows:—

Anxious from the first to get as near the centre of affairs as he could, and disappointed, by Fell's mishap, of his expected introduction to Wilkes, he conceived the idea of making a bold stroke so as to bring himself into direct relations with the man who, for the time, was even more of a popular hero than Wilkes—the Lord Mayor Beckford. His plan was to write a letter to his Lordship on affairs in general, and more particularly in praise of his Lordship's conduct as the champion of the city in their struggle with the Government. Here is a specimen of what he said:—

"MY LORD,—The steps you have hitherto taken in the service of your country demand the warmest thanks the gratitude of an Englishman can give. That you will persevere in the glorious task, is the wish of every one who is a friend to the constitution of this country. Your integrity ensures you from falling into the infamy of apostacy, and your understanding is a sufficient guard against the secret measures of the ministry, who are vile enough to stick at no villany to complete their detestable purposes. Nor can your British heart stoop to fear the contemptible threatenings of a set of hireling wretches who have no power but what they derive from a person who engrosses every power and every vice. . . . If the massacre of the Bostonians was not concerted by the ministry, they were to be enslaved in consequence of a settled plan, and as the one was the result of the other, our worthy ministers were the assassins. Alas! the unhappy town had not a Beckford! He would have checked the audacious insolence of the army, and dared, as an Englishman, to make use of his freedom. . . . His Majesty's behaviour, when he received the complaints of his people (not to redress them indeed, but to get rid of them, an easier way) was something particular—it was set, formal, and studied. Should you address him again, my Lord, it would not be amiss to tell his Majesty that you expect *his* answer, and not the answer of his mother or ministers. . . . Your Lordship has proved the goodness of your heart, the soundness of your principles, and the merit of the cause in which you are engaged, by the rectitude of your conduct. Scandal maddens at your name, because she finds nothing to reproach you with; and the venal hirelings of the ministry despair of meriting their pay by blackening your character. Illogical abuse and gross inconsistencies and absurdities recoil upon their author, and only bear testimony of the weakness of his head or the badness of his heart. That man whose enemies can find nothing to lay to his charge, may well dispense with the incoherent Billingsgate of a ministerial writer."

This paper, we say, he intended for the *Political Register*. But, either before getting it accepted there, or while it was still only in type, he sent a copy of it direct to Beckford. He

gives his Lordship a day or so to read it; and then ventures on that personal call to which he makes allusion in his letter to his sister of May the 30th. His Lordship, according to his own account,—and we see no reason to doubt it,—receives him very politely; and not only expresses his approbation of what he had already written, but consents to have a second letter, on the subject of the City Remonstrance and its reception by the King, publicly addressed to him. This call on Beckford probably took place about the 26th of May, or three days after the great affair of the Remonstrance, and when the town was still ringing with it. At all events, a letter bearing that date, and addressed to the Lord Mayor, was found in manuscript among Chatterton's papers after his death. This letter, beginning "When the endeavours of a spirited people to free themselves from an unsupportable slavery," &c., was almost certainly the letter he asked leave to address to Beckford; and it shows how completely he had succeeded in his object that he was able to make arrangements for its appearing in no less important a periodical than the *North Briton*. This paper—a continuation of Wilkes's celebrated periodical of the same name, which had been stopped in its 46th number—differed considerably from the ordinary newspapers of the day. It was of small folio size, and each number usually consisted of one careful essay, and no more, occupying about six pages of clear and elegant type, and sold for twopence-halfpenny. The editor and proprietor was a person named William Bingley, a printer, whose case was then much before the public. In 1768 he had, as a speculation, resumed the publication of the *North Briton*, after it had been discontinued for some years. In that year, however, having been summoned as a witness in one of the trials between Wilkes and the Government, he had given a singular proof of his obstinacy by making oath in Court that he would answer no interrogatories whatever unless he should be put to the torture. (See Junius, Letter VII.) Committed for contempt to the King's Bench, he remained there utterly immovable either by threats or by promises for a period of two years, publishing his *North Briton* all the same, and dating it from his prison; till, at last,

in the first week of June 1770, Government thought it best to let him out. As soon as he was released, he started a second weekly newspaper, called *Bingley's Journal, or the Universal Gazetteer*, of the regular newspaper size and form; the first number of which appeared on the 9th of June. This paper was not to interfere with the *North Briton*; both were to be issued every Saturday, at the same price, from Bingley's new premises at the Britannia, No. 31, Newgate Street. A connexion with Bingley, therefore, must have been thought of some importance by Chatterton; and it is another proof of his energy that, before Bingley was out of prison a fortnight, he had contrived to obtain such a connexion. Above all, to have his letter to Beckford brought out in large fine type in the *North Briton*, forming by itself one entire number of that famous paper, must have seemed to Chatterton a decided step of literary promotion.

The elation which Chatterton must naturally have felt at the idea of the publication simultaneously of two letters of his to the Lord Mayor in such important places as the *Political Register* and the *North Briton*, and at the prospects of farther recognition which would thus be opened up to him, was doomed to a bitter disappointment. After May he seems to have written next to nothing of a political character for the *Middlesex*, but to have waited for his letters and the *éclat* he anticipated from them. One of them did appear—that written first and sent to the *Political Register*. It was published in that periodical in the course of June, and bore the signature of "Probus." But before the other could appear, an event happened which made it impossible that it should appear at all. On the 21st of June, 1770, almost exactly a month after that crowning moment of his life, the presentation of the City Remonstrance, and when all London, Chatterton included, were expecting no end of similar manifestations of his spirit, Beckford died. His death was sudden—the consequence of a cold, which an imprudent journey of 100 miles, while it was upon him, had aggravated into a rheumatic fever. The town was thunderstruck; and for some days nothing else was talked of. Soon, however, the excitement died away; Beckford's

only legitimate son, then a boy of nine years, afterwards to be known far and wide as the author of “*Vathek*,” stepped into the inheritance of his father’s vast fortune, the wife being amply provided for by her settlement, and several illegitimate children at the same time receiving 5,000*l.* each; and the City people began to think which of the popular aldermen they should elect for the vacant term of the Mayoralty.

And what of poor Chatterton, to whom, with his two letters, and the hopes he had built upon them, an insurance on Beckford’s life was more necessary than to all the City besides? “When Beckford died,” Mrs. Ballance told Sir Herbert Croft, “he (Chatterton) was perfectly frantic and out of his mind, and said that he was ruined.” This is probably correct; and yet there is an authentic little record, from which it would appear that, after his first frantic regret was over, he tried to console himself ironically in a rather singular fashion. On the back of the identical letter, alluded to above, as having been sent to the *North Briton*, but which, as it could not now appear there, Chatterton had recovered and sent in manuscript to his friend Cary, there is an endorsement in Chatterton’s hand, evidently for Cary’s information, as follows:—

“Accepted by Bingley.—Set for, and thrown out of, the *North Briton*, 21st June, on account of the Lord Mayor’s death

Lost by his death on this Essay . . . . .	£	s.	d.
Gained in Elegies . . . . .	1	11	6
——— in Essays . . . . .	£2	2	0
	£3	3	0
	5	5	0
Am glad he is dead by . . . . .	£3	13	6”

So far as we are aware, this is the first time that grief was estimated in pounds, shillings, and pence; but we need not say that the method has some merits, and might, without much injury to truth, come into general use!

Beckford’s death seems, however, to have had one not unimportant effect on Chatterton’s literary exertions. Even before his interview with Beckford, as his letter to his sister of the 30th of May shows us, he had begun to have doubts as to the advantages of mere political writing—at any rate, of political writing on the Opposition side and for the news-



papers. For essays of this kind, he says, one was certainly sure of pay ; but the benefit ended there ! The " patriots " being all in search of place for themselves, there was little chance of any farther remuneration for articles on their side than the publisher's payment for the copy ! On the other hand, if one wrote for the Ministerial side, no publisher would take the articles, and one must pay to have them printed ; but then if one could make a hit, the Ministerial men would be glad of such a recruit, and could easily make it worth his while to serve them ! And then follows the maxim, so characteristic of the miserable boy, " He is a poor author who cannot write on both sides ; " and the statement that, if necessary, he will put this maxim in practice, by transferring himself to the Court-party. There is evidence that he actually made an attempt to carry the intention into effect. On that very 26th of May, on which he penned the letter to the Lord Mayor, which was to appear in the *North Briton*, lauding him and the patriots for their opposition to Ministers, he penned also another letter—afterwards found among his papers—addressed to Lord North, and signed " Moderator," in which, according to Walpole, he passes " an encomium on Ministers for rejecting the City Remonstrance." It was probably, therefore, the consciousness of having written these two letters on the same day that caused him to write to his sister so coolly about taking either side ; and what he says about the difficulty of getting Ministerial essays published may have been but the result of his own experience with regard to the " Moderator " letter. Evidently, however, after his introduction of himself to Beckford, he had resolved to wait the issue of that experiment before taking any farther steps towards the Ministerial side. But when Beckford died, and all his hopes from that acquaintance were over, his conviction of the uselessness of mere political writing in newspapers, especially if on the patriotic side, came back with fresh force.

There was independent reason why it should do so. Since the end of May there had been a perfect panic among the newspaper-proprietors. As early as the beginning of that month, we have seen, Edmunds of the *Middlesex Journal* had been pro-

seized by Ministers and committed to Newgate. And this was but the beginning of a series of similar prosecutions. After the City Remonstrance of the 23d of May, and Junius's terrible letter in the *Public Advertiser* of the 28th, ripping up the conduct of the Parliament just prorogued, and lashing Ministers for all their recent misdemeanours, including the massacre at Boston, the insult to the City, and the escape of the murderer Kennedy, Ministers seem to have made up their minds for a crusade against the Opposition press. On the 1st of June, Mr. Almon of the *London Museum*, the friend of Wilkes, was tried in Westminster Hall before Lord Mansfield, for selling a letter of Junius's in that publication; on the 13th, the greater culprit, Woodfall of the *Advertiser*, was tried at the King's Bench on a similar charge; and on the 13th of July, Mr. Miller, of the *London Evening Post*, was tried for copying a letter of Junius into his columns. All this had some effect. The proprietors of newspapers began to be chary of printing articles which might be their ruin. Thus, during the month of June, Chatterton seems to have found it impossible to get such articles into the *Middlesex Journal* as they had willingly taken from him in May. "The printers of daily publications," he writes to Cary on the 29th of June, "are all frightened out of their patriotism, and will take nothing unless 'tis moderate or Ministerial. I have not had five patriotic essays this fortnight: all must be Ministerial or entertaining." Accordingly, still keeping in reserve the possibility of becoming "Ministerial" if he should see occasion for it, he in the meantime falls back on the "entertaining;" that is, on miscellaneous non-political literature. And this leads us to our next topic—an account of Chatterton's literary exertions *out* of the field of politics during his first two months in London.

From the very first, he had by no means depended exclusively on political writing. In his letter to his mother of the 6th of May he says, "I get four guineas a month by one magazine, and shall engage to write a History of England and other pieces, which will more than double that sum;" and he clearly distinguishes between employment of this kind and "occasional essays for the daily papers."



Again, in his letter to his sister of May 30th, he speaks of an engagement with a speculative bookseller, the brother of a Scotch lord, who was to give him board and lodging for writing a History of London, to appear in numbers. How much of these statements about engagements to write large historical compilations for the booksellers was actual fact, founded on proposals which passed between the eager youth and the bibliopolic powers of Paternoster Row and its purlieus, and how much of it was mere hallucination, we cannot now say. Of schemes of this sort, at all events we hear nothing more; and whatever chances of literary work, as distinct from ordinary newspaper-writing, Chatterton did have in London, were limited to his connexions with various magazines.

We are able to enumerate all the magazines with which, during the months of May and June, Chatterton is known to have had any dealings. First, and by far the most hopeful as regarded receipts for his exchequer, was the *Town and Country*, to which he had been a pretty constant contributor, since its second number in February 1769. This magazine, which had a very large sale, was published on the last day of every month at the price of one shilling; and though the editor and proprietor, Hamilton, must have been rather surprised when his well-known Bristol correspondent presented himself at his office, at St. John's Gate, Clerkenwell, to find him so young, he appears to have behaved civilly, and to have allowed Chatterton to regard the magazine as one of his surest resources now that he had settled in town. Next, there was the *Freeholder's Magazine*, somewhat more political in its character, and also published on the last day of each month, price sixpence. With this also Chatterton had had some acquaintance before leaving Bristol; and we have seen that, during his first ten days in London, he was disposed to regard it and its editor, Mr. Fell, as his mainstay. After Fell's imprisonment, however, when the magazine went into other hands—the hands, as we find from an advertisement of the ninth number (that for May 1770), of a certain “patriotic society,” who employed W. Adland and J. Browne of Red-lion Court, Fleet Street, to print it for them—Chatterton says

little of it. He did apparently write for it; but not much. Of greater consequence in his eyes was the *London Museum*, a shilling monthly, printed, as we have said, by J. Miller, of Queen's Head Passage, and which, in May 1770, had attained to its fifth number. Next was the *Political Register*, already described. After it, may be mentioned *The Court and City Magazine*, price sixpence, six numbers old in May 1770, printed by J. Smith of 15, Paternoster Row, and characterised in the advertisements as "A Fund of Entertainment for the man of quality, the citizen, the scholar, the country gentleman, and the man of gallantry, as well as the fair of every denomination." This magazine had plates, as indeed most of the others had; and from the advertised contents of one or two numbers, we judge that the light amatory vein was deemed the most attractive by the publishers. Lastly, there was the *Gospel Magazine*, begun, as we find, in 1768, and printed and sold, in 1770, by M. Lewis of No. 1, Paternoster Row. This magazine, the purpose of which, as stated on its title-page, was "to promote Religion, Devotion and Piety from evangelical principles," usually consisted, if we may judge from the contents of a few numbers, of scraps of sermons and short religious biographies and the like, followed by a few pieces of religious verse.

The editors of Chatterton's Remains, after his death, were not so careful as they might have been in recovering his contributions to the various London Magazines, or even in giving the exact dates and references of those which they did recover. The task, in any case, was not an easy one. Chatterton adopted various signatures, and some of his contributions may have appeared, as was then common, without any signature at all. It is possible, therefore, that trifles which have been assumed as his were not really his; and it is far more possible that trifles which he did write have been neglected. On the whole, after such references as we have been able to make to the old periodicals themselves, we give the following as the list of at least the chief of Chatterton's known contributions to these periodicals (the poetical columns of newspapers included) from his arrival in London to the end of June:—

- "Narva and Mored, an African Eclogue," in verse, dated May 2, 1770: appeared in the *London Museum* for May
- "A Song," addressed to Miss C      am, of Bristol, in seven stanzas, dated "London, May 4."
- "The Methodist," a short Hadibrastic squib; dated May, 1770. .
- "Elegy," beginning "Why blooms," &c , dated "Shoreditch, May 20," and published in the *Town and Country Magazine* for May.
- "The Prophecy;" a political poem, in eighteen stanzas, published in the *Middlesex Journal* of May 31, along with the "Letter to the Freeholders of Bristol."
- "The Death of Nicon, an African Eclogue," in verse; dated "Brooke Street, June 12," and published in the *London Museum* for June. [This is the piece to which we have alluded as proving Chatterton's removal to Brooke Street early in June.]
- "Maria Friendless," a short tale in prose, dated "June 15," and published in the *Town and Country Magazine* for June.
- "The False Step;" a short prose tale, published in the same number of the *Town and Country Magazine*.
- "Anecdote of Judge Jeffries," a short paragraph, published in the same number of the *Town and Country Magazine*.
- "On Punning," a short letter, dated "June 16," and published in the same number of the *Town and Country Magazine*.
- A Paper signed "Hunter of Oddities," dated "Slaughter's Coffee-house, June 15," and describing the conduct of a mad gentleman seen there; published in the same number of the *Town and Country Magazine*. [This was the fourth of a series of papers, all bearing the same signature, and having the same object—namely, the description of odd characters picked up in walking about London. There are about twelve papers in all in the series, extending over all the numbers of the magazine for 1770. Chatterton was certainly the author of some of them; and though the rest were published after his death, and even dated after it, this may have been only the Editor's way of using copy which Chatterton had given him in a lump.]
- "Elegy on W. Beckford, Esq.," in 12 stanzas, published in June.
- "Letter to the Lord Mayor," signed "Probus," published in the *Political Register*, some time in June.

We believe that, if this list were extended by the addition of scraps from the same periodicals which look as if they were Chatterton's, and of similar scraps from the *Court and City Magazine*, the *Gospel Magazine*, and the *Freeholder*, it might be more than doubled. We know, for example, that Chatterton must have written more on Beckford's death, both in verse and in prose, than the elegy above-mentioned could amount to. He estimated his earnings on this topic at five guineas. Indeed, it was in connexion with this topic that he made the only venture towards independent publication of which there is any record. In the *Middlesex Journal* of July 3rd, there is the following advertisement: "This day was published, price one shilling, an Elegy on the much-lamented death of William Beckford, Esq., late Lord Mayor of, and Representative in

Parliament for, the City of London : Printed by G. Kearsly, at No. 1, Ludgate Street." A copy of this publication has survived, and, on comparing it with the Elegy of Chatterton mentioned above, it is found to be the same, with sixteen additional stanzas. Here are the opening stanzas :—

" Weep on, ye Britons ! give your gen'ral tear ;  
But hence, ye venal—hence each titled slave ;  
An honest pang should wait on Beckford's bier,  
And patriot Anguish mark the patriot's grave.

" When like the Roman to his field retired,  
'Twas you (surrounded by unnumber'd foes)  
Who call'd him forth, his services required,  
And took from Age the blessing of repose."

Whether Chatterton gained any part of his five guineas by this publication, or whether he lost some of them by the venture, we do not know. The Elegy is as good as was going, but is poor enough, and perhaps did not sell.

But we have not yet taken account of all Chatterton's efforts to make money and win fame, during his first two months in London. Besides writing political articles for the newspapers, and miscellaneous scraps of a more literary kind for the magazines, he made, as we gather from his letters, a distinct effort towards connecting himself with what may be called generally the minor dramatic literature of the metropolis. Within a month after his arrival in London, as we have seen, the two great theatres of Drury Lane and Covent Garden were closed for the season ; so that, even had there been any way of getting into relations with the managers of those theatres, there was no time to turn it to immediate use. But, though the greater theatres were shut, one or two minor or summer theatres were open. Thus, at the Haymarket, Foote was just about to bring out, for the delight of the town, his comedy of the "Lame Lover;" perhaps the greatest theatrical hit of that year. Sadler's Wells was also in its glory. But whatever dreams of future work for those places may have passed across Chatterton's mind, there was as yet no means of realizing them ; and all that his ambition did conceive as within its reach, for the present, was the chance of becoming connected with one or other of those places of

evening musical and pyrotechnic entertainment which competed with the minor theatres for the right to entertain the more dissipated Londoners during the summer and autumn months. Of these there were three of some note—Ranelagh Gardens, at Chelsea ; Vauxhall Gardens on the Surrey side of the Thames, over against Millbank ; and Marylebone or Marybone Gardens, on the site of part of the present New Road. At all these places, the entertainments consisted of promenading under brilliant lights, hearing concerts of music, sipping tea and coffee or more expensive beverages, and seeing, at the close, grand displays of fireworks. Any hope that Chatterton could entertain of contributing to the provision involved in such a bill of fare, could obviously consist only in his ability to furnish words for the musical portion of it. It did so happen that he had an opportunity of making his ability in this respect known, and that this opportunity was more especially in connexion with Marylebone Gardens. We see no reason to doubt the literal accuracy of his account to his mother on the 14th of May, of the accidental manner in which the connexion was brought about. “Last week,” he says, “being in the pit of Drury Lane Theatre, I contracted an immediate acquaintance (which you know is no hard task to me) with a young gentleman in Cheapside, partner in a music-shop, the greatest in the city. Hearing I could write, he desired me to write a few songs for him : this I did the same night, and conveyed them to him the next morning. These he showed to a Doctor in music, and I am invited to treat with the Doctor on the footing of a composer for Ranelagh and the Gardens.” For a while we hear no more of this bargain or its results ; but, in the end of June, writing to Cary, who had apparently been already informed of all the particulars, he reports progress. “A song of mine,” he then says, “is a great favourite with the town, on account of the fulness of the music. You will see that and twenty more in print after the season is over. I yesterday heard several airs of my burletta sung to the harpsichord, horns, bassoons, hautboys, violins, &c., and will venture to pronounce, from the excellence of the music, that it will take with the town.”



If we interpret this into the language of direct statement, the facts seem to be—that having, early in May, written some songs for some music-publisher who had an interest in Marybone Gardens, one or two of these had already been set to music, and perhaps sung at the Gardens, in the course of one of the concerts, by Mr. Reinhold, Mr. Bannister, or Mrs. Barthelemon, who were then the Marybone stars; and that, these having pleased, he had made some kind of arrangement for a more extensive attempt, in the shape of a continuous burletta to be brought out at the Gardens, as soon as might be convenient,—had already before the end of June finished this burletta and handed it over to the composer, and had even had the pleasure of hearing some of the airs of it in rehearsal.

All this is corroborated by the evidence of Chatterton's remaining writings. For some five-and-twenty years, indeed, after his death, all traces of either his burletta or his songs seem to have been lost; but in 1795, a Mr. Atterbury, who somehow came into possession of the manuscripts, published both together in the form of a neat little pamphlet, having this title-page, "*The Revenge: A Burletta, acted at Marybone Gardens 1770; with additional songs; by Thomas Chatterton.*" Prefixed to "*The Revenge,*" there is this list of *dramatis personæ*.

Jupiter . . . . .	MR. REINHOLD.
Bacchus . . . . .	MR. BANNISTER.
Cupid . . . . .	MASTER CHENEY.
Juno . . . . .	MRS. THOMPSON.

The natural inference is, that the Burletta was actually performed at the Gardens. After looking over the newspapers for 1770, however, in which there is a pretty complete series of advertisements of the entertainments at the Gardens from the beginning to the end of the season, we have found no trace of any such burletta having been produced that year; and we rather incline to think that, if the production took place at all, it was not till a subsequent season. Of five short songs, however, printed along with the burletta, it seems likely enough that one, entitled *A Bacchanalian*, and purporting to have been "sung by Mr. Reinhold," was actually sung



by that gentleman at one of the mixed concerts; and it may be the very song respecting which Chatterton wrote to Cary. Another of the five, entitled *The Invitation*, has attached to it the words, "To be sung by Mrs. Bartholomon and Master Cheney;" as if it had not yet gone so far as the other. The remaining three have no singer's name attached to them. Probably, however, to have had one song actually sung at the Gardens, another about to be sung, and a burletta in progress, seemed to Chatterton sufficient success. At all events, no sooner was one burletta off his hands, than he began another of a more modern dramatic character, entitled *The Woman of Spirit*, the several parts of which are distributed by anticipation thus:—

Distort . . . . .	MR. BANNISTER.
Councillo. Latitat . .	MR. REINHOLD.
Endorse . . . . .	MASTER CHENEY.
Lady Tempest . . .	MRS. THOMPSON

Of this intended burletta only two scenes were written.

No one can read these dramatic attempts of the industrious boy without a new impression of his extraordinary cleverness and versatility. *The Revenge*, which is in two acts, and is written in rhyme throughout, partly in passages of recitative, but with numerous solo airs, one or two duets, and a chorus at the close, might really, if set to tolerable music, have been a pleasant piece to hear. The words are decidedly better than those of many of the musical burlesques which succeed now-a-days. The story is that of a quarrel between Jupiter and Juno, on account of an assignation which Jupiter has made with Maia; the plot is thickened by the introduction of Cupid and Bacchus; and, after the usual amount of confusion and cross-purpose, all ends happily. Here is a specimen—a dispute between Bacchus and Cupid respecting the comparative worth of their respective functions.

BACCHUS (with a bowl).

*Recitative.*—Od'sniggers, t'other draught, 'tis dev'lish heady;  
Olympus turns about (*staggers*), steady, boys, steady!

*Air.*—If Jove should pretend that he governs the skiea,  
I swear by this liquor his Thundership lies,  
A slave to his bottle, he governs by wine,  
And all must confess he's a servant of mine.

*Air changes.*—Rosy, sparkling, powerful wine,  
 All the joys of life are thine ;  
 Search the drinking world around,  
 Bacchus everywhere sits crown'd.  
 Whilst we lift the flowing bowl  
 Unregarded thunders roll.

*Air changes.*—Since man, as says each bearded sage,  
 Is but a piece of clay,  
 Whose mystic moisture lost by age,  
 To dust it falls away,  
 'Tis orthodox, beyond a doubt,  
 That drought will only fret it ;  
 To make the brittle stuff hold out  
 Is thus to drink and wet it.

*Recitative.*—Ah ! Master Cupid, 'slife, I did not s' ye ;  
 'Tis excellent champagne, and so here's t' ye :  
 I brought it to these gardens as imported ;  
 'Tis bloody strong ; you need not twice be courted ;  
 Come, drink, my boy——

CUPID.

Hence, monster, hence ! I scorn thy flowing bowl :  
 It prostitutes the sense, degenerates the soul.

BACCHUS.

Gadso, methinks the youngster's woundy moral !  
 He plays with ethics like a bell and coral.

*Air.*—'Tis madness to think,  
 To judge ere you drink :  
 The bottom all wisdom contains.  
 Then let you and I  
 Now drink the bowl dry ;  
 We both shall grow wise for our pains.

CUPID.

*Recitative.*—Pray, keep your distance, beast, and cease your bawling,  
 Or with this dart I'll send you caterwauling.

*Air.*—The charms of wine cannot compare  
 With the soft raptures of the fair ;  
 Can drunken pleasures ever find  
 A place with love and womankind ?  
 Can the full bowl pretend to vie  
 With the soft languish of the eye ?  
 Can the mad roar our passions move  
 Like gentle breathing sighs of Love ?

BACCHUS.

Go, whine and complain  
 To the girls of the plain,  
 And sigh out your soul ere she comes to the mind ;  
 My mistress is here,  
 And, faith, I don't fear,  
 I always am happy, she always is kind.

*Air changes.*—A pox o' your lasses !  
 A shot of my glasses  
 Your arrows surpasses ;  
 For nothing but asses  
 Will draw in your team.

Whilst thus I am drinking,  
 My misery sinking,  
 The cannikin clinking,  
 I'm lost to all thinking,  
 And care is a dream.

CUPID.

Provoking insolence ! &c.

One would like to know, if possible, the exact pecuniary result for Chatterton of all those various exertions of his during his first two busy months in London—his political articles and essays, his miscellaneous poems and other literary trifles contributed to magazines, and his songs and burletta for Marybone Gardens. Our only data for this calculation are contained in two small documents found among his papers. On one scrap found in his pocket-book was the following jotting—an account, as it would seem, of his earnings up to the 23rd of May :—

	£	s.	d.
"Received to May 23, of Mr. Hamilton, for <i>Middlesex</i> . .	1	11	6
" " of B—— . . . . .	1	2	3
" " of Fell for the <i>The Consuliad</i> (one of Chatterton's longer satirical poems, which Fell had apparently bought for the <i>Freeholder's Magazine</i> )	0	10	6
" " of Mr. Hamilton for "Candidus" and "Foreign Journal" (paragraphs, it seems, for the <i>Middlesex</i> or the <i>Town and Country</i> ) . . . . .	0	2	0
" " of Mr. Fell . . . . .	0	10	6
" " <i>Middlesex Journal</i> . . . . .	0	8	6
" " Mr. Hamilton, for 16 songs . . . . .	0	10	6
	<hr/>		
	£4	15	9 "

This, probably, carries his earnings on to the end of May. The other document referred to, is that already quoted, giving an ironical account of the balance in his favour by Beckford's death, which is estimated at 3*l.* 13*s.* 6*d.* This, of course, was but one item in his receipts for June, though probably, from the nature of the topic, the most important item. On the whole, remembering that during this month his earnings by newspaper-writing were almost *nil*; and also allowing for the likelihood (and there is too much reason to fear it was a fact) that some of his earnings by the magazines of that month, including even part of the elegiac 3*l.* 13*s.* 3*d.* remained unpaid—we shall probably be correct if we say that Chatterton's

total receipts during his first two months in London cannot have exceeded 10*l.* or 12*l.* There is a tradition, indeed, of his having received five guineas for his burletta, but we know of no foundation for it.

Chatterton was singularly abstemious in his personal habits. He drank only water, and rarely touched meat. Even at his mother's house in Bristol he would rarely eat animal food, assigning as his reason that "he had work on hand and must not make himself more stupid than God had made him." His receipts, therefore, small as they were, would probably have satisfied all his absolute wants for a considerable time. But there were other respects in which he did not deny himself. "I employ my money now," he writes to his sister on the 30th of May, "in fitting myself fashionably, and getting into good company," *i.e.* going to coffee-houses, the gardens, the theatres, &c. Add to this little tokens sent home to his mother and sister; and it will not be difficult to see how, before the end of June, even without supposing any extravagance, the greater part of the ten or twelve guineas earned may have evaporated. Still, there is as yet no appearance of despondency in Chatterton as to the future. What he had spent in dress and "getting into good company" was sure to bring him in interest; and month after month would bring each its own earnings! If money flowed as fast as honours upon him, he would give his sister a portion of 5,000*l.*! That day might be still distant; but, at least, he could look forward to the time when his mother and sister should leave Bristol and join him in London; when he could take apartments for them and himself; when they should be, all three, happy together, walking out on Sundays to Hampstead or Kensington; and when the heaven over London *should* begin to glow and blush with the burning beneath it of that hard-to-ignite but still surely combustible river, and the whole town, his mother and sister included, should gaze at the crimson air and see *his* portrait and the letters *T. C.* freaked in keener fire in the heart of the crimson! Dream on, poor boy, for the end is not yet!

It will have been observed that all this while, in his ceaseless efforts to become known in London, Chatterton made no

use of his antiques. Of at least one of those longer modern satirical pieces which he had brought with him to town from Bristol—that called *The Consuliad*—he had contrived to make something ; but though he must have had his tragedy of *Ælla* with him, his fragment of the tragedy of *Goddwyn*, his *Tournament*, his *Battle of Hastings*, and others of his Rowley poems, he seems to have made no attempt to get them published. Indeed, his only allusion, after his arrival in London, to the Rowley poems, is contained in his saying to his sister that if Rowley had been a Londoner, instead of a Bristowyan, he could have lived by copying his works. It is possible, however, from his writing to his sister for his MS. glossary of obsolete terms, that he may have had some scheme in his head with regard to his antiques. One wonders what would have been the effect if he had tried the London public with a bit of his *Ælla*, fresh from his lodging in Brooke Street. Fancy Johnson, Goldy, Warton and the rest of them reading it ! The London antiquarians of that day may be supposed to have been to the Bristol ones, in respect of perspicacity, as hawks to doves ; but what a fluttering there would have been even among the hawks ! Would it have been better for Chatterton had he made the attempt ? Who can tell ? On the one hand, by refraining from it, he moved on to a fate sad enough ; on the other, he might have lived on a hardened literary liar.

## CHAPTER IV.

## BROOKE STREET, HOLBORN.

CHATTERTON had been in his new lodging in Brooke Street now about three weeks. During that time he had become pretty well acquainted with his landlady, Mrs. Angell, and with her husband, Frederick Angell, who was engaged in some trade or business which took him from home during the day, leaving his wife, and any assistants she may have had, to their dress-making. Always of social habits and willing to converse with those about him, he seems now and then to have sat with Mr. and Mrs. Angell of an evening, talking

with them about himself, his mother and sister, and even his literary plans and expectations. The impression he made on these people was very much the same as that made on the Walmsleys; except that they seem to have been somewhat superior in their general notions to the Shoreditch folks, and more capable of understanding what their lodger's occupations were. The wife said afterwards, "He was very proud, but never unkind to any one;" and the husband "always considered him something wonderful," noticed that he "appeared to be very fond of his mother and sister," and had "never seen him drink anything but water." Both, however, regarded him as decidedly odd, and, latterly at least, had misgivings as to whether he might not one day go out of his mind. Very similar were the impressions of some neighbours, who were acquainted with Mrs. Angell, heard her speak of her lodger, and sometimes saw him in her house, and from their own windows as he went out and in. Among these there was a Mrs. Wolfe, the wife of a hair-dresser who had a shop in Brooke Street, three doors from Mrs. Angell's, where brushes, combs, and perfumery were sold. Being an intimate acquaintance of Mrs. Angell, she had seen Chatterton often, and "always thought him very proud and haughty." Sometimes she thought him "crazed." One night, as late as twelve o'clock, chancing to be out on some errand, she saw him walking up and down the street, "talking loud and occasionally stopping as if to think on something." In the same street, and apparently between Mrs. Angell's door and the corner of Holborn, lived a Mr. Edwin Cross, an apothecary. Dropping in at his shop, Chatterton, by familiarly talking with him over the counter, had, almost from the first day of his residence in Brooke Street, struck up an acquaintance with him. Cross, who, from his profession, was probably a man of some intelligence, began to contract a real liking for him; he thought him "an astonishing genius," and knew that he was engaged in writing for newspapers and magazines. Before he had been long in Brooke Street, it became his settled habit to call and chat with Cross every time he passed his door, which was usually two or three times every day. Cross



observed that he seemed to know something of physic, and was very fond of talking about it.

So the month of July opens ; Chatterton going out and in as usual, and sitting up late at night in his room among the tiles ; still in high spirits, if not so fresh as at first, and still also with some money in his pocket. This last fact is somewhat touchingly proved by his next letter home, dated July 8th ; sent, apparently along with a box, by the Bristol coach or carrier.

"DEAR MOTHER, I send you in the box——

"SIX cups and saucers, with two basins, for my sister. If a china tea-pot and cream pot is, in your opinion, necessary, I will send them ; but I am informed they are unfashionable, and that the red china, which you are provided with, is more in use.

"A cargo of patterns for yourself, with a snuff box, right French, and very curious in my opinion.

"Two fans.—The silver one is more grave than the other, which would suit my sister best. But that I leave to you both.

"Some British herb-snuff in the box—be careful how you open it. (This I omit, lest it should injure the other matters.) Some British herb-tobacco for my grandmother, with a pipe. Some trifles for Thorne. Be assured, whenever I have the power, my will won't be wanting to testify that I remember you. Yours,

"T. CHATTERTON.

"July 8, 1770.

"N.B.—I shall forestall your intended journey and pop down upon you at Christmas.

"I could have wished you had sent my red pocket-book, as 'tis very material.

"I bought two very curious twisted pipes for my grandmother ; but, both breaking, I was afraid to buy others, lest they should break in the box, and, being loose, injure the china. Have you heard anything further of the clearance ? Direct for me, at Mrs. Angell's, sack maker, Brooks Street, Holborn."

From his giving his address at the end of this letter, it is perhaps to be inferred that he had not till now acquainted his mother with his change of lodging. Probably, as we have said, he still called at Walmsley's for his letters. This would account for Mrs. Ballance's knowing his state of mind on the occasion of Beckford's death.

The next letter, written to his sister, three days after the last, is partly a continuation of it ; but it contains some references to his literary occupations of the past month, and his expectations for the month just begun.

"DEAR SISTER,—I have sent you some china and a fan. You have your choice of two. I am surprised that you chose purple and gold. [Was this for the fan or for one of the promised 'silks?'] I went unto the shop to buy it ;

but it is the most disagreeable colour I ever saw—dead, lifeless, and inelegant. Purple and pink, or lemon and pink, are more genteel and lively. Your answer in this affair will oblige me. Be assured that I shall ever make your wants my wants, and stretch to the utmost to serve you. Remember me to Miss Sandford, Miss Rumsey, Miss Singer, &c. &c. &c. As to the songs, I have waited this week for them, and have not had time to copy one perfectly. When the season's over, you will have them all in print. I had pieces last month in the following magazines—*Gospel Magazine*, *Town and Country*, (viz. 'Maria Friendless,' 'False Step,' 'Hunter of Oddities,' 'To Miss Bush,' &c.,) *Court and City*, *London*, *Political Register*, &c. &c. The *Christian Magazine*, as they are not to be had perfect, are not worth buying. [This Magazine, begun in 1760, and carried on till 1767, had some celebrity as having been edited by Dr. Dodd; and probably his sister or some one else had been inquiring about it.]

I remain yours,

"July 11, 1770.

"T. CHATTERTON."

The next, also to his sister, is nine days later; and it was the last but one that she and her mother were to receive from him.

"I am about an Oratorio, which, when finished, will purchase you a gown. You may be certain of seeing me before the 1st of January, 1771. The clearance [from Mr. Lambert] is immaterial. My mother may expect more patterns. Almost all the next *Town and Country Magazine* is mine. I have an universal acquaintance: my company is courted everywhere; and could I humble myself to go into a compter, could have had twenty places before now. But I must be among the great; state-matters suit me better than commercial. The ladies are not out of my acquaintance. I have a great deal of business now, and must therefore bid you adieu. You will have a longer letter from me soon—and more to the purpose. Yours,

"T. C.

"20th July, 1770."

These three letters, giving us glimpses as they do of Chatterton at three successive points in the month of July, carry us over nearly the whole of that month. It is necessary, however, to examine them a little in the light which subsequent facts cast upon them.

It is evident, at least, that in the beginning of that month, Chatterton was not in want of money. The presents sent to his mother, sister, and grandmother, seem to have been rather costly for a youth in his circumstances; and probably left him with so little, that had it been known at home how disproportionate to his means had been this proof of his affection, the pleasure in receiving it would have been mixed with anxiety and fear. Clearly, however, from the first, it was Chatterton's pride to convey to his mother and sister the idea that he was getting on splendidly; and probably it was part of his chief delight in sending the presents, to fancy how they would

be exhibited on the widow's table to her acquaintances,—how Lambert, Barrett, Catcott, and the rest would hear of them, and what inferences, reflecting on their own inability to appreciate a youth of genius, these Bristol pettifoggers would draw from them ! Still, great as were Chatterton's affection and pride, it is not to be conceived that he would have actually impoverished himself in gratifying them, unless at the time he had been convinced that he had such prospects of continued work as could at least supply him with what was absolutely necessary for his own subsistence. Unfortunately, when we look carefully at the second and third letters, we begin to perceive a kind of consciousness creeping through, that he had, at the time of writing the first, been too sanguine in this respect. There are the same bragging generalities as in the earlier letters of May and June—extremely “busy,” “an universal acquaintance,” “his company courted everywhere,” and the like ; but there is no such profuse mention as in these earlier letters of specific shifts and contrivances in reserve against the coming weeks, and of actual engagements on hand. He tells of his great doings in last month's magazines ; but when he condescends on the business of the month then passing, all that he says is, that his songs, which he had expected to see in copper-plate by this time, were still not out ; that he had begun an oratorio ; and that Hamilton had so much of his copy that nearly the whole of the forthcoming *Town and Country Magazine* would be his. We hear nothing of farther work for the *Middlesex Journal*, for the *Political Register*, for the *London Museum*, or any of the other periodicals. In short, it is too plain that, by the end of July, Chatterton is in want of work and begins to know it.

One can see various reasons why Chatterton should somewhat suddenly have found himself in this predicament, without resorting to the supposition—though there may be something in that too—that he and his bookselling patrons were not on such good terms as at first, and that, by his incessant calling upon them, he had begun to be regarded by them as a bore.

The months of July and August, we should think, were

then, even more than now, about the slackest portions of the London year; and in the year 1770 they seem to have been even slacker than usual. It was the season of the Parliamentary recess, and of the hot summer weather, when all who were not absolutely tied to town were away taking their holiday. Wilkes and his family, we find, were off to a watering-place on the southern coast, *en route* for the Continent. And so with other families in the same station—some north, some west, some south, according to their tastes and opportunities. The Margate hoys were in full activity, conveying their annual freights of sea-sick London tradesmen, and their wives and children, and packets of unnecessary sandwiches, to that greedy coast-town of Kent, where the lodging-house keepers had already raised their prices, and the bathing-machines were out on the beach, and all the shop-windows were exhibiting their plates of boiled prawns and shrimps, and the dancing saloons and petty theatres were in full play. Even men who were never happy out of the London streets, yielded to custom and forsook them now. The taverns and coffee-houses had little to do. The clubs were all broken up, and their scattered atoms were wandering melancholy among green fields, smelling the fresh hay, amusing the farmers by their ignorance of crops, and saying it was so pleasant to get away from town, but really longing for the time when they should again come together in their familiar rooms in the courts round about Temple Bar, and sit down, reconstituted for another year, to their punch, their gossip, and their oysters.

So it was with the famous club of the Turk's Head, Gerard Street. Where Garrick, Burke, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, and the rest of the club were rusticating, we do not know; but we can trace the great Doctor Samuel, and his dear familiar Goldy.

Johnson, whom Boszzy had left with regret in the previous November, in order to go back to Scotland and settle down as a married man, had produced nothing this year except his Tory pamphlet on the Wilkes question, entitled *The False Alarm*; the effect of which had been to procure him no end of abuse from the Opposition writers, and to fill the Opposition



papers with paragraphs about his pension. In the midst of this unpopularity he had been living on as usual, and making preparations for a new edition of his "Shakespeare." But in the end of June,—the poet Akenside had died on the 23rd of that month, and his body was then lying in its coffin in his house in Burlington Street,—he did as others were doing and went out of town. His purpose was to visit his native Lichfield, and other parts of the midland counties. During a considerable portion of the month of July he was at Lichfield, whence, as we learn from Mr. Croker, he wrote two letters to Mrs. Thrale at Streatham. In one of these, dated the 11th of July—the day on which Chatterton wrote the second of the foregoing letters from Brooke Street—we find him informing Mrs. Thrale that he was going about in his native town, "not wholly unaffected by the revolutions" that had taken place in it since he remembered it, and, in particular, taking considerable interest in a book recently found by Mr. Greene, an apothecary of the town, which showed "who paid levies in our parish, and how much they paid, above an hundred years ago." "Many families," he says, "that paid the parish rates are now extinct, like the race of Hercules. *Pulvis et umbra sumus*. What is nearest touches us most. The passions rise higher at domestic than at imperial tragedies." Thus moralizing about Lichfield and its vicinity, the ponderous and noble man remained out of town apparently about three months in all; for it is not till the 21st of September that we are sure of his being again back in his well-known quarters in Johnson's Court.

During a portion, at least, of this same period, Goldsmith was also absent from them. His *Deserted Village* had appeared this year, on the 26th of May, and may, therefore, have been read by Chatterton during the first week of his residence in Brooke Street. Three new editions were called for in the course of June; and it was with the pathos of that exquisite poem fresh in his heart, and its pictures of rural peace and beauty in contrast with the crowded anguish of cities, still vivid in his fancy, that Goldsmith, in the middle of July, permitted himself to be taken off on a short continental tour,

as one of a party made up by his friends the Miss Hornecks. Precisely at the time when Chatterton was writing his last letters home, and beginning to see want staring him in the face, was this kindest of Irish hearts taking leave for a while of Brick Court, Fleet Street, and all its pleasant cares. Ah, me! so very kind a heart was that, that one feels as if, when it left London, Chatterton's truest hope was gone. Goldsmith never saw Chatterton; but one feels as if, had he remained in London, Chatterton would have been more safe. Surely—even if by some express electric communication, shot, at the moment of utmost need, under the very stones and pavements that intervened between the two spots—the agony pent up in that garret in Brooke Street, where the gaunt despairing lad was walking to and fro, would have made itself felt in the chamber in Brick Court; the tenant of that chamber would have been seized by a restlessness and a creeping sense of some horror near; he would have hurried out, led, nay driven, by an invisible power, and, by the grace of God, Brick Court and Brooke Street would have come together! O, the hasty excited gait of Goldsmith as he turned into Brooke Street: the knock; the rush upstairs; the garret-door burst open; the arms of a friend thrown round the friendless youth; the gush of tears over him and with him; the pride melted out of the youth at once and for ever; the joy over a young soul saved! Phantasy all, phantasy all! What *might* have been is one thing; what *has* been is another. In those late days of July, when Chatterton was beginning to foresee the worst, Oliver Goldsmith, having escaped the little mishaps of his journey, in the society of the “Jessamy Bride,” and her sister, from London to Dover, from Dover to Calais, from Calais to Lille, and from Lille to Paris, was going about in Paris seeing the sights, but longing, even in such sweet company, to be back in London again, and getting very nervous on account of his arrears of work. He was in Paris on the 29th of July, and remained there some time. Latterly the party was joined by a person who rather spoiled the pleasure of it for poor Goldy—a certain coarse attorney, Mr. Hickey; who would persist in quizzing him before the



ladies, and who afterwards brought home the story that, when the party went to Versailles, Goldy, in order to prove himself right in saying that a certain distance beyond one of the fountains was within a leap, actually took the leap and fell into the water. All August, Goldy had to bear his absence from London, the thought of his arrears of work, and the jokes of Mr. Hickey. Not till the first week in September was he back in town.

Well, but though Goldsmith, Johnson, Wilkes, the legislators of the country, and all the families of the wealthier tradesmen were out of town on their annual holiday, the town was not empty. A huge host of citizens of all classes remained behind on duty, tiding over the languid season as best they could; keeping their windows open to abate the heat of the afternoon sun as it beat on the brick houses, and strolling out of an evening, if they could, to enjoy the cooler air of the parks, and the green suburbs round. And these, of course, still constituted "the town;" and "the town," even in the languid season, *will* have its excitements and its topics of gossip. Thus, in London, in the months of July and August 1770, though there was a comparative lull in politics, consequent on the preternatural excitement of the first half of the year, there was still matter of interest for the newsmongers. On the 29th of June, Alderman Trecothick had been elected, after a somewhat brisk contest in the city, to succeed Beckford in the Mayoralty; and on the 12th of July, Beckford's place, as representative of the city in Parliament, was filled up, after similar opposition, by the election, in the old city fashion, of Alderman Oliver. These elections, affording room as they did for new trials of strength between the Wilkesites and the Court party, were not regarded with indifference; and indeed it was not till the second of the two was over that Wilkes himself left town. Then, there was a good deal of interest among the city people about a proposed statue to Beckford; and motion after motion on the subject was discussed at the common council. The trial of Mr. Miller, of the *London Evening Post*, for re-publishing Junius's letter, did not come on till the 13th

of July, and gave rise to new arguments respecting the liberty of the press, and the conduct of Lord Mansfield. A trial of a different character, and far more *piquant* for the town at large, was that of his Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland, on an action for damages brought against him by the husband of a certain lady of high rank. The jury awarded 10,000*l.* of damages, greatly to the delight of the town. For many weeks the newspapers, other matters not being abundant, lived on this trial, reporting the proceedings at great length, commenting on them, and printing piece by piece the letters that had passed between the aristocratic lovers. When cloyed with this delicious literature, citizens and their apprentices who were in search of amusement could avail themselves of the Haymarket and Sadler's Wells Theatres, or of one or other of the public gardens. Foote at the Haymarket was drawing crowds by his *Lame Lover*; and at the Marybone Gardens, the favourite pieces were *The Magic Girdle*, and *Serva Padrona*. By way of morning relish after such evening dissipations, the citizens could hear of robberies committed over-night, and particularly of robberies of the post-boys carrying the mail-bags to and from London. Robberies of this class were unusually common at the time, so that the post-boys never set out without making up their minds to the chance of meeting a highwayman. One post-boy who was robbed, the papers informed their readers, was fifty years of age.

Attending to all this news from *his* hot lodging in narrow Brooke Street, with a view to extract occupation for his pen out of it, Chatterton, as we have said, had begun to find the task a very hard one. No doubt he went about the streets with his eyes and ears open, and entered the coffee-houses to see what he could pick up there in the shape of information or suggestion. No doubt he called frequently at the office of the *Middlesex Journal*, and made proposals to Bingley of the *North Briton* for essays in lieu of the cancelled one on Beckford, and similar proposals to the *London Museum*, the *Court and City Magazine*, and the *Political Register*. But, whether it was that some of the printers and

editors were out of town, or that they were overstocked already and disposed to retrench, or that they had ceased to care for having Chatterton's contributions in particular, certain it is that all these efforts were fruitless. On the *Town and Country Magazine* alone had he any hold. "Almost all the next *Town and Country Magazine* is mine," he says to his sister on the 20th of July ; and this is in reality the sum-total of his literary dependence for that month. We have looked over the July number of the Magazine, in order to verify the statement. The following is a list of its contents :—

"1. State of Europe for July ; 2. \*Character of Eolus, by a Hunter of Oddities ; 3. Anecdote of Young Reynard ; 4. An original letter from a Tutor to his r——l pupil, 5 Letter from an Irish Fortune-hunter, 6 History of the Tête-à-tête, or Memoirs of Tom Tilbury, &c. ; 7. Amusing and instructive Questions ; 8. Remonstrance from the Secretary of the Female Coterie ; 9. Particular Details in the Trials of the Printers for publishing Junius's Letter ; 10. Sergeant Glynn's Argument (in the same case) at large ; 11. Lord Mansfield's Charge (in the same case) ; 12. The Folly of Despair—a moral Tale, 13. The Danger of Deceit, 14. Singular Resolution of a Married Lady, 15. The Theatre, No XVIII ; 16. A most comic Scene from the *Lame Lover* ; 17. Trial of his R. H. the Duke of C——, 18. Letters of the D—— of C—— and Lady—— ; 19. Mr. Wedderburne's Argument and Mr. Dinning's Reply ; 20. Charge on a late remarkable Trial, 21. The Gardener's Kalendar for July ; 22. Character of Peter the Great ; 23. Reflections on the Characters of Caesar and Addison ; 24. \*Memoirs of a Sad Dog, Part I. ; 25. \*The Polite Advertiser, by Sir Butterfly Feather, 26. A Defence of Lady——, by a Member of the Female Coterie ; 27. Experiments on certain Dissolvents for the Stone, 28. Account of New Books, &c. ; 29. Mathematical Questions and Answers, 30. Poetical Pieces ; 31. Foreign Affairs ; 32. Domestic Intelligence ; 33. Births, Marriages, Deaths, Bankrupts, &c. &c."

Of these articles, only the three which we have marked with asterisks, are identified as Chatterton's by the editors of his Remains. It is possible, however, that he wrote some of the others. Still, on any supposition, his contributions to the number form but a small proportion of the entire contents. This fact may, to some extent, be reconciled with his statement, in anticipation, to his sister, by supposing that, though he had supplied Hamilton with copy enough to fill a much larger space in the Magazine, Hamilton had, contrary to expectations, published only a small portion of it, and reserved the rest for future numbers. It is certain, at least, that papers by Chatterton did continue to appear at intervals in the future numbers of that year. Thus, in the August number (published, it must be remembered,

on the last day of August), there appeared not only the second part of the *Memoirs of a Sad Dog*, but also a paper on *The Origin, Nature, and Design of Sculpture*, to accompany an engraving of a design for Beckford's statue, and a tale called *Tony Selwood*, both written by Chatterton. These, we imagine, with other pieces published still later, were all in Hamilton's hands in time for the July number; but he divided the *Sad Dog* into two, so as not to give the public too much of him at a time; and he found it convenient to postpone the rest.

The *Memoirs of a Sad Dog*, as being one of the largest of Chatterton's prose pieces, and as having been written at the period when he was beginning to despond, deserve some notice. They are the imaginary autobiography, in brief, of one Harry Wildfire, who, having been left five thousand pounds by his frugal father, sets about spending it as a fast man. First he lost one of his thousands in gambling; and the remainder soon went in successive debaucheries. Reduced to his last penny, he then throws himself on his brother-in-law, Sir Stentor Ranger, a country knight, whose ideas are limited to horses, but who, having some rough, natural kindliness, forthwith instals his reprobate relative in the post of chief of his stables. Sir Stentor sometimes has visitors at his old place, and among these is "the redoubted Baron Otranto" of antiquarian celebrity; who, poking about the house, falls in with what he considers a remarkable curiosity in the shape of a stone with an old inscription in Gothic letters. This he deciphers with great pains as "*Hic jacet*," the "*corpus*" of somebody or other of the thirteenth century; the fact, known to all the stable-boys, being that the stone was taken from a neighbouring churchyard, and was nothing more than the memorial of an honest couple, James Hicks and his wife. After living with Sir Stentor two years, and making some money on the turf, Wildfire recommences his old career, and carries it on till he is again ruined, when, as a last shift, he comes to town, and betakes himself to literature. At the moment of his writing his sad relation, he says he is "throned in a broken chair within an inch of a thunder-cloud." Such is the story. The writing



is slipshod in the extreme, and the spirit deplorably coarse; nor is there any merit in the construction. The sole interest it has consists in a certain evidence it furnishes of rough satirical force, and in an occasional passage, like that on Walpole, bearing on the author's own life and circumstances. Thus, the hero, after describing one of his periods of good fortune, breaks out in mock heroics as follows :—

"But, alas! happiness is of short duration; or, to speak in the language of the high-sounding Oasian, 'Behold thou art happy; but soon, ah! soon, wilt thou be miserable. Thou art as easy and tranquil as the face of the green-mantled paddle; but soon, ah! soon, wilt thou be tumbled and tossed by misfortunes, like the stream of the water-mill. Thou art beautiful as the Cathedral of Canterbury, but soon wilt thou be deformed like Chinese palace-palings. So the sun, rising in the east, gilds the borders of the black mountains, and laces with his golden rays the dark brown heath. The hind leaps over the flowery lawn, and the reeky bull rolls in the bubbling brook. The wild boar makes ready his armour of defence. The inhabitants of the rocks dance, and all nature joins in the song. But see! riding on the wings of the wind, the black clouds fly. The noisy thunders roar; the rapid lightnings gleam, the rainy torrents pour; and the dropping swain flies over the mountain, swift as Bickerstaff, the son of song, when the monster Bumbailano, keeper of the dark and black cave, pursued him over the hills of death, and the green meadows of dark men.' Oh, Oasian immortal genius! what an invocation could I make now! But I shall leave it to the abler pen of Mr. Duff, and spin out the thread of my own adventures."

The conclusion of the piece is even more specific. Mr. Wildfire, from his "broken chair within an inch of the thunder-cloud," thus details his brief experience as an author in London :—

"The first fruits of my pen were a political essay, and a piece of poetry. The first I carried to a patriotic bookseller, who is, in his own opinion, of much consequence to the cause of liberty; and the poetry was left with another of the same tribe, who made bold to make it a means of puffing his magazine, but refused any gratuity. Mr. Britannicus [Bingley of the *North Briton*?], at first imagining that the piece was not to be paid for, was lavish of his praises, and, I might depend upon it, it should do honour to his flaming patriotic paper, but when he was told that I expected some recompense, he assumed an air of criticism, and begged my pardon, he did not know the circumstance, and really he did not think it good language or sound reasoning!—I was not discouraged by the objections and criticisms of the bookselling tribe; and, as I knew the art of Charles pretty well, I made a tolerable hand of it. But, Mr. Printer, the late prosecution against the booksellers having frightened them all out of their patriotism, I am necessitated either to write for the entertainment of the public or in defence of the ministry. As I have some little remains of conscience, the latter is not very agreeable. Political writing of either side of the question is of little service to the entertainment or instruction of the reader. Abuse and scurrility are generally the chief figures in the language of party. I am not of the opinion of those authors who deem every man in place a rascal, and every man out of place a patriot. Permit this, then, to appear in your universally-admired magazine: it may give some entertainment to your readers and a dinner to

"Your humble servant,

"HARRY WILDFIRE"

This, we fear, was but too true a description of Chatterton's own circumstances while he was writing. He too was "throned on a broken chair within an inch of a thunder-cloud," and had come to the extremity when too literally the purpose of giving entertainment to his readers was bound up with that of obtaining means for his own next dinner. But it was not, as in the case of his imaginary hero, "the monster Bumbailiano," that was pursuing him over the hills of death, and the green meadows of dark men. It was a more fearful monster still—the monster Want, without any bailiff as harbinger. No imaginary five thousand pounds had *he* wasted; no writs were out against *him*; else, probably,—for Debt, though negative property, still is a kind of property, and functions as such to the advantage of its possessor,—it might have been better for him! He was but a poor widow's son of Bristol, who had been working like a slave for three months in London to obtain the barest livelihood, and now found that even that was failing him.

Hamilton, at best, must have been a stingy paymaster. Judging from the rate of his previous payments—two shillings for two paragraphs, and half-a-guinea for sixteen songs—Chatterton's receipts from him for his July contributions can have gone but a very little way; even if they had not been spent in anticipation before the month was over. It seems clear enough, too, that if Hamilton did pay punctually, according to his miserable tariff, he was resolute against solicitations for an advance on the faith of future work, or even of manuscript on hand. Accordingly, during the latter half of July, we are to fancy Chatterton almost at his last shilling. One day during that month—we imagine it shortly after he had sent off the presents to his mother and sister, if indeed it was not while he was packing up those presents—he went into Mrs. Wolfe's shop to buy some curls which he had seen in her window, and which he said he wanted to send to his sister; but, on hearing the price, he could not pay it, and "went away seemingly much mortified." This argues that, when he had sent off the presents, he was left with next to nothing. He did contrive,



however, during that month, and indeed to the last, to pay his landlady regularly for his room ; preferring, as a matter of course, that the deficit, if there must be one, should be in his own actual food. No visits any longer to the theatres and the gardens ; visits to the coffee-houses, if made at all, conducted on the most parsimonious scale ; no purchases of articles of dress, as at first ; his very shoes, if we could see the soles, worn through, so that the dust gets in as he walks, and if it rains his feet are wet ! As he walks out, it is this consciousness of his shuffling and poverty-stricken appearance that most distresses him ; and it is part of his meditations, as people pass him, whether they remark it. Probably what he cares far less about is that, in the privacy of his lodging, he lives on bread and water. But his landlady, aware of the full extent of his poverty, has noted this circumstance as the most symptomatic of all. She has even ascertained that he always buys his loaves, one of which lasts him for a week, “as stale as possible,” that they may “last the longer.” Moved by this and by other observations of the same kind, she ventures one day, when he is paying her his rent, and when she knows that he has no money at all left, to offer him back sixpence. He refused to take it, saying with some anger, and pointing to his forehead, “I have that here which will get me more.” Cross, the apothecary, also notices when he calls upon him, that his appearance betokens extreme want. Indeed, he learns from Chatterton himself that Mr. Hamilton, who is now his chief reliance, is “using him very badly ;” *i. e.*, as we suppose, either will not pay him for articles already contributed, or will not let him have a farthing in advance. Cross, as delicately as possible, invites him again and again to take a meal with himself and Mrs. Cross ; but “he was so proud,” that he never could get him to do so, and even feared giving him offence by repeating the invitation. He had come more and more to like him, and to enjoy his chats twice a day with him over the counter ; on which occasions, as he afterwards told Warton, “his conversation, a little infidelity excepted, was most captivating.”

And so out and in, out and in, during all the late days of July, wanders the poor youth, growing daily more wan and haggard; out in the morning, or about mid-day, on his daily round among the publishing and editorial offices near, the doors of which begin to be shut against him; or farther still, on his aimless ramble into the suburbs and the sequestered places of the parks, where methinks I sometimes see him weeping under trees; and then, fatigued and fevered, back again in the evening to his lodging, where, with his stale loaf and a mug of water beside him, he sits up nearly all night, scribbling hopelessly his *Harry Wildfires* and his *Tony Selwoods*, or sometimes merely gazing hour after hour at the empty grate. Mrs. Angell "frequently found his bed untouched in the morning when she went to make it." The biographers of Schiller tell how persons, going to a kind of bank or high ground behind the poet's house at Weimar, could see him stalking up and down in his lighted room till long after midnight, engaged in poetical composition, every now and then sitting down to write what he had just completed in thought, and helping himself freely to wine, or to coffee with wine in it, to maintain his phrenzy. Had the watchman of Brooke Street stood opposite that window among the tiles, the light of which he must have noticed burning so long after all the others were dark, he, too, might have seen the shadow of a poet pass and repass. But there was a difference between the two cases. In the one, it is a famous and noble man, to whose nerves the world will willingly permit wine or spices, or whatever else may be necessary that they may thrill ecstatically; in the other, it is a poor boy, not yet eighteen, living on a crust and water, and writing that he may get more of that. There he sits! The short July night passes; the light of the morning breaks over the city, paling that by which he is writing; he looks up to be aware that another day has come, that people are moving about the streets, and that the sparrows are chirping along the eaves!

July is gone, and it is now the month of August. There is no better hope. Indeed, the prospect is worse. The last

dribblet of money from Hamilton, on account of July, is exhausting itself as former dribblets had done ; and, Hamilton having already enough of his copy on hand, there is no demand for any new copy for the August number of the *Town and Country*. All other magazines and periodicals are closed as before. If he writes at all, it must be on pure speculation, or for the mere sake of writing.

So much, probably, had become known to him before August was ten days old. Mercifully it is not given to us to know the history of those ten days. Out and in, out and in, every day twenty-four hours long, and each of these hours to be gone through somewhere and somehow, that is the substance of the history, even if it could be told. Cross, who could now see that his visitor was "half-starving," and to whom he is more confidential about his circumstances than to any one else, takes the opportunity of recommending him to return to Bristol. "He only heaved a deep sigh," said Cross, "and begged me with tears in his eyes never to mention the hated name again." There is indeed something unaccountably stubborn in his determination not to ask any assistance from that quarter. One would think that a letter to Catcott or even to Cary, stating the actual truth, would have had some result ; not to say that, poor as his mother was, it was certainly within her power, if even by selling what he had sent her and other things, to have sent him a sum sufficient to prevent the worst. But he has ceased to write home, and they can only guess what he is doing. Rather than that the truth should be known in Bristol, and that, after all his boasting, the jest should go round among his friends there of his total failure, he will die of starvation !

One effect, however, Cross's recommendation seems to have produced. The thought, we have seen, of obtaining a clerk's place or some similar situation in a counting-house in London, had more than once occurred to him ; and also the thought of getting some kind of appointment that would take him abroad. To this last notion in a somewhat modified form he now returns. Fond, when in Bristol, of reading medical books, which Barrett used to lend him, he had picked up, as he

thought himself, a considerable smattering of medical knowledge; and much of his talk with Cross was about physic. In consequence perhaps of something that passed in these conversations, it appeared to Chatterton that it might be possible for him to get an appointment as surgeon or surgeon's mate on board of some ship. How he proposed to manage it, we cannot say; but in those days "the experienced surgeons" that ships, and especially African ships, carried, were probably, in many cases, without the qualification of a diploma. Chatterton, at all events, was prepared to doctor any crew that would take him. As a first step towards trying for such an appointment, he thought it worthwhile to apply to Barrett for some kind of certificate or testimonial which he might show to owners of vessels. This he appears to have done directly in a letter sent to Barrett; but he also did it indirectly in the course of a letter to Catcott, written on the 12th of August. The second letter is extant. It is evidently an answer to one which Catcott had sent to him.

"London, August 12, 1770.

"SIR,—A correspondent from Bristol had raised my admiration to the highest pitch, by informing me that an appearance of spirit and generosity had crept into the niches of avarice and meanness—that the murderer of Newton, Ferguson, [James Ferguson, the mechanic, who had written a popular work simplifying Newton's Philosophy?] had met with every encouragement that ignorance could bestow; that an episcopal palace was to be erected for the enemy of the whore of Babylon, and the present turned into a stable for the ten-headed beast; that a spire was to be patched to St. Mary Redcliffe, and the streets kept cleaner; with many other impossibilities. But, when Mr. Catcott (the *Champion* of Bristol) doubts it, it may be doubted. Your description of the intended steeple struck me. I have seen it, but not as the invention of Mr. ——. All that he can boast is Gothicizing it. Give yourself the trouble to send to Mr. Weobley's, Holborn, for a view of the Church of St. Mary de la Annunciation, at Madrid, and you will see a spire almost the parallel of what you describe. The conduct of — is no more than what I expected. I had received information that he was absolutely engaged in the defence of the ministry, and had a pamphlet on the stocks which was to have been paid with a translation [*i.e.* to a new see; for it is clearly Dr. Newton, Bishop of Bristol, that is meant.] In consequence of this information, I inserted the following paragraph in one of my 'Exhibitions' [newspaper-squibs so named]:—'Revelation unravelled by —: The ministry are indefatigable in establishing themselves; they spare no expense so long as the expense does not lie upon them. This piece represents the tools of the Administration offering the Doctor a pension, or translation, to new model his treatise on the Revelation, and to prove Wilkes to be an Atheist.'

"The Editor of *Baddeley's Bath Journal* has done me the honour to murder most of my hieroglyphics, that they may be abbreviated for his paper. Whatever may be the political sentiments of your inferior clergy, their superiors

are all flamingly ministerial. Should your scheme for a single row of houses in Bridge Street take place, conscience must tell you that Bristol will owe even that beauty to avarice; since the absolute impossibility of finding tenants for a double row is the only occasion of your having but one. The Gothic dome I mentioned was not designed by Hogarth. I have no great opinion of him out of his ludicrous walk; *here* he was undoubtedly inimitable. It was designed by the great Cipriani. The following description may give you a faint idea of it. From an hexagonal spiral tower (such as I believe Redcliffe is) rose a similar palisado of Gothic pillars, three at a cluster in every angle, but single and at equal distance in angular spaces. The pillars were trifoliated (as Rowlie terms it), and supported by a majestic oval dome, not absolutely circular (that would not be Gothic), but terminating in a point, surmounted with a cross, and on the top of the cross a globe. The last two ornaments may perhaps throw you into a fit of religious reflection, and give rise to many pious reflections. Heaven send you the comforts of Christianity! *I* request them not; for I am no Christian. . . .

"I intend going abroad as a surgeon. Mr. Barrett has it in his power to assist me greatly by *his* giving me a physical character. I hope he will. I trouble you with a copy of an Essay I intend publishing.

"I remain your much obliged humble Servant,

"THOMAS CHATTERTON.

"Direct to me at Mrs. Angell's, sack-maker, Brooke Street, Holborn."

Aha! What words were these that one heard? "Heaven send you the comforts of Christianity! *I* request them not; for I am no Christian!" The whole letter, with its hollow mocking bitterness, and its cool architectural details penned by one who knew himself to be on the brink of starvation, has for us an air of horrible irony; but these words, flung into it so carelessly, complete the impression, and convert the horrible into the ghastly.

"I am no Christian." The words are simple, strong, and straightforward. What do they mean? They mean that he, a youth of seventeen years and nine months, born in a town in the west of England, bred up there as an attorney's clerk, and now lodged in a London garret, without food to eat, has, by dint of reading and reflection, come to the conclusion that the Divine One who died in Judæa eighteen hundred years ago, and whom all the generations of men in the fairest lands of the world since have been worshiping as the Son of God, and building temples to, and believing in as their Lord and Saviour, was in reality no such thing or being, but, at the utmost, a wise and holy Jew! They mean that he, this same English stripling, has, in virtue of this conclusion, come to regard all that part of the past history of eighteen centuries which had proceeded on the belief in Christianity, as so much human

action, grand perhaps in itself, but done in pursuit of an illusion! They mean that, looking about him upon all the apparatus of bishops, churches, and schools established in the service of this belief, he could view it with a smile, as a fabric with no foundation, piled up by ancient zeal, and cemented by time, custom, and the necessities of social arrangement! They mean that, remembering the names of great men recently or anciently dead, who had nourished their souls in this belief, and clung to it through grown manhood to grey old age, and died serene in it, and left their testimonies to it as their most solemn words to the world, he could yet account for all this to himself by supposing that these men were and would have been noble anyhow, and that the special form of their nobility alone was due to this intense grasp they had taken of Humanity's largest hallucination! They mean more! They mean that he, the boy of Bristol, was decidedly of opinion, with Voltaire and others, that, though the earth had rolled on for ages, a brown ball spinning in the azure, and freighted with beings capable of weal and woe, all longing, as by the one sole law of their constitution, to hear some voice from behind the azure, no such voice had really spoken, nor any tongue of light from the outer realms of mystery ever struck the surface of the planet, either in Judæa or elsewhere! They mean that the world did not seem to him at all to rest certainly on any rule of love; but to be possibly only an aggregate of beings, more or less clever, more or less miserable, and more or less rich, jostling together and working on to some end, though no one could say what! They mean that in the matter even of Immortality, or a future world in continuation of this, he had no absolute certainty; that sometimes he might have a glimpse of such immortality as possible, but that again the glimpse would vanish quite, and it would seem to him that when a man died there might very well be an end of him, and that, should the earth itself ever meet a sufficient catastrophe to destroy all the life upon it at once, there would be some risk of an end to the race too, and to all the accumulated memories and maxims of its sages and Shakespeares, and all the vast lore of its libraries! Sometimes, indeed, he might have his



new doubts on this, and might think both of individual life as continued, and of the collective wisdom of the world as safe against any catastrophe, and sure, should the earth itself be cracked in pieces or shrivelled to a scroll, to take wing elsewhere at the moment of the last shriek, and prolong itself somewhere and somehow to the further issues of the Universe! But, at all events, for the Heaven and Hell of the Christian he could have no belief left; and if a poor wretch, weary of the world, did think fit to kill himself, his soul, if he had one, could fare none the worse in the future life for the one act of rushing suddenly into it!

There is abundant proof in scores of passages in Chatterton's writings, and in his recorded conversations with his friends among the young men of Bristol, that, after the peculiarities of that coarse and scoffing fashion of infidelity which had crept over so much of English society in his day, and which was represented in such men as Wilkes, he had substantially accustomed himself to the above method of regarding the Christian religion. It is unnecessary to multiply quotations to illustrate his way of speaking of Methodists, preachers like Whitfield, and priests in general. Here is one, selected as being comprehensive :—

“ 'Tis mystery all : In every sect  
You find this palpable defect—  
The axis of the dark machine  
Is enigmatic and unseen ;  
Opinion is the only guide  
By which our senses are supplied.”

Now, it was of supremely little consequence to Christianity that one precocious lad the more had taken this attitude of hostility to it. But it was of some consequence to the lad himself. There are and have been many—and these men in our Parliaments and in other high places—who might in a certain sense use Chatterton's phrase, “I am no Christian,” and probably, in using it, speak the exact truth; and yet who never do use it, but leave it to their loud-mouthed critics to make the inference for them. One has to distinguish, therefore, between the sceptic who finds no occasion for asserting this negative side of his views at all, and the sceptic who is

vehement in proclaiming the negative. The second is in a different stage intellectually, and morally in a more restless predicament. He is always proclaiming his independence of a certain class of considerations, and yet he is always meddling with them. So it was with Chatterton. In his statement "I am no Christian," and his spasmodic variations of it through his writings, one sees him fascinated, as it were, by the very creed towards which he is malignant, so that he cannot avoid making it the topic of his thoughts. It is as if he saw that he had parted with certain beliefs, the very pretence of which, the very habit of even nominally professing them, was a safeguard to those who were capable of it. It is as if he were conscious of one check less upon his own course to ruin than even ordinary youths around him had. Nay more, said at the moment at which they were said, his words to Catcott are a proof that the writer has again been, for some reason or other, catechising himself on the subject to which they refer. He has been turning one sarcastic look more, as it were, in his depression and despair, to those "comforts of Christianity" the efficacy of which, in such circumstances, he has all his life heard mentioned ; and the result is, that he finds they will not suit him and remits them to Mr. Catcott.

Well, but was there no equivalent? If the Christian has a source of faith and hope that the world knows not of, and that bears him up, as nothing else could, in times of worldly distress and trial; still it is known by universal experience, that, in such times of worldly distress and trial, men who are not Christians do not uniformly break down. That fervid and impassioned man of majestic thought and gait, people do not call him a Christian; they call him a Pantheist or a Philosopher, or something of that sort; and yet, were he at his last shilling, or his last crust, were the rack prepared for him and the multitude howling for his destruction, every one knows that he would endure and come through! *Si fractus illabatur orbis, impavidum ferient ruinæ*. He believes in Justice, and God, and the Everlasting! Nay more, that tough little fellow, all grey iron and scepticism, whose very principle it is that there is no Everlasting, and that men ought "to apprehend no farther than this

world, and square their lives according ;” he too, unless his antecedents belie him, might be beaten a long time between any size of hammer and any shape of anvil ! He, too, could come through. Why, since the beginning of the world, people have been coming through ! Quiet, plain scholars have lived, before now, in German or in Scotch University towns on boiled peascods for months, or a single guinea a quarter earned by teaching, without saying much about it. Had youths of this type been in Chatterton’s place in London, in August, 1770, they would have most probably survived the crisis. They would have availed themselves gratefully, and yet honestly, of such small immediate aid as those aunts and other relatives that we hear of so slightly in Chatterton’s letters, (one of them, a carpenter, who had married one of his aunts,) might perhaps, though poor, have willingly offered at the sharpest moment of the emergency ; and, even failing that, they would have conquered by sheer patience. How was it, then, in Chatterton’s case—the “ comforts of Christianity ” being placed out of the question ?

Chatterton never would call himself an Atheist. In a time when Wilkes and other contemporaries, whose language he sometimes borrowed, carried on their outrages on Christianity very much in that character, Chatterton, by the very structure of his genius as a boy of ardour and imagination, retained something in him of a poet’s reverence for the sublime and the awful. In express anticipation, in one of his satirical poems, of the stigma of Atheism, he says—

“ Fallacious is the charge ; ’tis all a lie,  
As to my reason I can testify.  
I own a God, immortal, boundless, wise,  
Who bid our glories of Creation rise ;  
Who form’d his varied likeness in mankind,  
Centering his many wonders in the mind.”

And, again, in one more solemn soliloquy, on which one dwells with peculiar interest, as perhaps, in its kind, the highest utterance by the poor boy of what was best in him, and which reminds one of similar bursts of natural piety in the writings of Burns and Byron :—

“ O God, whose thunder shakes the sky,  
Whose eye this atom globe surveys,  
To Thee, my only rock, I fly,  
Thy mercy in Thy justice praise.”

*Autograph of Chatterton, 1770.*

The mystic mazes of Thy will,  
The shadows of celestial light,  
Are past the power of human skill;  
But what the Eternal acts is right.

O teach me in the trying hour,  
When anguish swells the dewy tear,  
To still my sorrows, own thy power,  
Thy goodness love, thy justice fear!

If in this bosom aught but Thee  
Encroaching sought a boundless sway,  
Omniscience could the danger see,  
And Mercy look the cause away.

Then, why, my soul, dost thou complain?  
Why drooping seek the dark recess?  
Shake off the melancholy chain,  
For God created all to bless.

But ah! my breast is human still;  
The rising sigh, the falling tear,  
My languid vitals' feeble rill,  
The sickness of my soul declare.

But yet, with fortitude resign'd,  
I'll thank the Inflicter of the blow,  
Forbid the sigh, compose my mind,  
Nor let the gush of misery flow.

The gloomy mantle of the night,  
Which on my sinking spirit steals,  
Will vanish at the morning light  
Which God, my East, my Sun reveals."

Well for the poor fatherless boy had this mood been permanent! But, at the time of his extreme need these comforts, even of such natural religion as he had, seem to have taken their flight too, and left him, mocking and bitter, face to face with despair.

Nor had Chatterton the resources to be found in rectitude and gentleness of mere worldly character. Impetuous, stormy, industrious, and energetic, as he was, there was still in him an element of weakness in what he called his "pride," as well as in his open contempt for all the commoner forms of moral principle. Above all, he had in him the conscious sense of a past imposture, and of innumerable minor deceits practised in prosecuting it. Rowley, once the darling phantasm of his poetical imagination, now dogged him as a hateful demon, evoked by himself from the world of spirits, and not to be laid to rest. Wherever he moved, and in whatever form of new labour or distraction he engaged, he could not look back over his shoulder, but there was to be seen the

form of this demon, in the garb of a Bristol monk of the fifteenth century, with his hideous old face under a cowl, grinning and gliding after him. In short, whether we view Chatterton's character as it naturally was, or those recollections of past lies and deceits with which he had burdened his conscience so as to deprive his character of half its natural force, he was very likely to endure much, and yet to break down at a point where others in the same circumstances might have found longer endurance quite possible.

After all, however, the most material fact in the case remains to be told. Physical causes were at work. Bereft of the amount of actual food, and of other comforts, necessary, even with his abstemious habits, to keep body and soul healthily together; wandering about London in a perpetual state of fever and excitement; returning home to write night after night without rest or sleep—little wonder if he had overstrained his physical capabilities, and if brain and nerve began to fail in their office. Whatever taint of hereditary insanity was in him, derived from the old line of sextons who had jangled in past generations the keys of St. Mary's Church in Bristol, and walked at midnight through its aisles, and dug the graves of its parishioners; or derived, more immediately, from that drunken, wild-eyed father, whom he had never seen, but who used to tell his tavern-companions that he believed in Cornelius Agrippa the necromancer—it had now at last come out in a way not to be mistaken. From his childhood, there had been symptoms of it—his fits of weeping, his sudden paroxysms of passion, his long reveries when he gazed at people without seeming to see them, his frequent mutterings aloud. Not till now, however, had these traits passed the limits of what could be considered compatible with sanity. But now, almost certainly, these limits *were* passed. Noticing the strange haggard lad walking about the streets, muttering perhaps to himself, or making sudden gestures, or looking at what was passing, sometimes vacantly, and sometimes with glances unusually keen and bright, even strangers could not but follow him with their eyes, and wonder who he was and where he came from. Had the stranger been one

accustomed to the ways of the insane, he would probably at once have pronounced that his brain was affected. And had the stranger been able, with this idea in his mind, to pursue his inquiries farther, so as to ascertain what peculiar form or species of insanity had taken possession of him, he would have found that it was that form which physicians recognise as the "suicidal tendency." Physicians, as all know, do recognise this as a form of madness; and though they allow that a perfectly sane man may commit suicide after deliberate reasoning on the point, they attribute a large proportion of suicides to the action of a certain specific impulse which reason cannot overcome. In Chatterton's case, as we have seen, there had been premonitory appearances of the existence of this tendency. The idea of suicide had from the first been familiar to him.

Something like positive proof exists that, before the month of August, 1770, was very far advanced, Chatterton was actually in the specific maniacal condition which physicians recognise as capable of being induced by circumstances where there is a predisposition. The landlady, Mrs. Angell, who had always thought him odd, said that towards the end of the time during which she knew him, she "did not think he was quite right in his mind." Mr. Cross noticed his growing restlessness and the sudden fits of vacancy and silence that came upon him sometimes when he was talking rapidly. He also noted, though he did not put the right interpretation on it at the time, that in his talks about medicine, he would frequently lead on to the subject of poisons, and inquire with great apparent interest into the nature and effects of different poisonous drugs. Even in the letter to Catcott which we have quoted, we seem to see traces of over-excitement of brain, and of that morbid spirit of hatred to persons which results from it. Finally, there is a story of a letter sent by him to his mother, on or about the 15th of August, which was written in such a strain as to cause her very great anxiety. This letter—the last she ever received from him—is not extant, like the others; but Mrs. Edkins, the wife of a painter and glazier in Bristol, who lived long afterwards and communicated many particulars about



the Chatterton family, distinctly remembered having been sent for by Mrs. Chatterton when the letter was received. She found Mrs. Chatterton "in tears and very uneasy," on account of the contents of the letter; and particularly on account of one part of it, in which he told her a strange story of his walking among the tombs in a churchyard, and suddenly, in a fit of absent meditation, stumbling into an open grave. "But," added he, in his humorous way, "it was not the quick and the dead together," for he found the sexton under him, who was digging the grave! (Various forms of this story have come down, one of which fixes the churchyard in question as having been that of St. Pancras.) Mrs. Edkins tried to console Mrs. Chatterton by saying it was only "one of his reveries;" but "she could not be persuaded to consider it otherwise than as ominous."

And so it proved. Barrett, very properly, refused to give Chatterton the certificate he wanted of competence for the situation of surgeon's mate on board an African ship; and the refusal was one disappointment the more added to those which were already preying upon him. His misery was almost at its climax. Cross, renewing his invitations to him to come and take a meal with him, was surprised to find him one day consent. That evening he partook of a supper of oysters at Cross's house, and was observed, as Cross afterwards told Warton, "to eat most voraciously." For aught that we know, it was the last meal he had. On the 22nd of August, at all events, he had reached that extreme beyond which our fancies of human destitution cannot go. On that day, according to Mrs. Angell's account, he "came home in a great passion with the baker's wife, who had refused to let him have another loaf till he had paid her 3s. 6d. which he owed her previously." Whether Mrs. Angell behaved as one would think most landladies in such circumstances would have done, it is hardly necessary to inquire. To know that a poor boy was starving under her roof, and, though he had been as proud as Lucifer, not to find means, if even by calling in the police, of breaking down his resolution against eating at her expense, might seem an incredible heartlessness in the worst of women.

Probably she blamed herself much afterwards ; for when, some years later, Sir Herbert Croft tried to find her out and question her about Chatterton, he could never see her, though she still lived in the same house, and he called many times. He ascertained that she was a very timid woman, whose circumstances were such that she regarded every unknown visitor as a bailiff in disguise, or some one meaning her harm ; and hence, if not from a dislike, as we have supposed, to be farther questioned about her mysterious lodger of former years, she was always out of the way. From all that we can gather, however, her fault was less want of kindness than want of energy and sense ; and probably, if we knew the exact facts in their exact order, her conduct, such as it was, might seem more explicable. Her neighbour, Mrs. Wolfe, whom Sir Herbert Croft did see, told him that Mrs. Angell said Chatterton was in a moping state for a day or two ; and that, though she tried, she could not prevail upon him to eat anything. She certainly did not foresee what was going to happen, or she would have made greater efforts. The refusal of the baker's wife, on the 22nd, had broken the last bond that kept Chatterton to life. On that or the following day, hope, patience, and all force of reason finally forsook him ; and he was secretly bidding farewell to the world. Strange that at this very moment something was happening in his favour, which, had he but known it, might even then have roused him and determined him to live. The Rev. Dr. Fry, Head of St. John's College, Oxford, had by some means or other seen some of the antique Rowley Poems which had been circulating in Bristol, and, having conceived an unusual desire to know something more about them and their authorship, was on the eve of setting out for Bristol, to make inquiries about Chatterton, whom he supposed still to be there. O Dr. Fry, make haste ; set out at once ; life or death depends upon it ! Dr. Fry, not knowing what we now know, takes his own time, and lives to regret it. He did make the journey, but it was too late.

On the 23rd of August—the day was Thursday ; the morning, according to the old weather-registers, “ hazy,” but the day “ fine” — Chatterton “ appeared unusually grave ;” and

Mrs. Angell, according to her own account, given while she was yet accessible, asked him "What ailed him?" to which he answered pettishly, "Nothing, nothing! Why do you ask?" This is all that is recorded of that day, during which he seems hardly to have left the house. On the morning of the next day, Friday, the 24th of August "clouds, sunshine, and showers at intervals," is the description of the day in the registers he "lay in bed longer than usual" (the words are Mrs. Angell's); "got up about ten o'clock, and went out with a bundle of papers under his arm, which, he said, 'was a treasure to any one; but there were so many fools in the world that he would put them into a place of safety, lest they should meet with accident.'" He walks, as usual, with this bundle under his arm, down Brooke Street; disappears somewhere about Holborn, and after a little reappears in Brooke Street, and calls at Mr. Cross's shop. "He called on me"—is Mr. Cross's statement—"about half-past eleven in the morning." As usual, he talked about various matters, and at last, probably just as he was going away, he said he wanted some arsenic for an experiment. Mr. Cross, Mr. Cross, before you go to your drawer for the arsenic, look at that boy's face! Look at it steadily; look till he quails; and then leap upon him and hold him! Mr. Cross does not look. He *sells* the arsenic (yes, '*sells*:' for, somehow, during that walk in which he has disposed of the bundle, he has procured the necessary pence); and lives to repent it. Chatterton, the arsenic in his pocket, does not return to his lodging immediately, but walks about, God only knows where, through the vast town. "He returned," continues Mrs. Angell, "about seven in the evening, looking very pale and dejected; and would not eat anything, but sat moping by the fire with his chin on his knees, and muttering rhymes in some old language to her." After some hours, "he got up to go to bed," and "he then kissed her—a thing he had never done before." Mrs. Angell, what can that kiss mean? Detain the boy; he is mad; he is not fit to be left alone; arouse the whole street rather than let him go! She does let him go, and lives to repent it. "He then went up stairs," she says, "stamping on every stair as he went slowly up, as if he would

break it." She hears him reach his room. He enters, and locks the door behind him.

The Devil was abroad that night in the sleeping city. Down narrow and squalid courts his presence was felt, where savage men clutched miserable women by the throat, and the neighbourhood was roused by yells of murder, and the barking of dogs, and the shrieks of children. Up in wretched garrets his presence was felt, where solitary mothers gazed on their infants and longed to kill them. He was in the niches of dark bridges, where outcasts lay huddled together, and some of them stood up from time to time and looked over at the dim stream below. He was in the uneasy hearts of undiscovered forgers, and of ruined men plotting mischief. He was in prison-cells, where condemned criminals condoled with each other in obscene songs and blasphemy. What he achieved that night, in and about the vast city, came duly out into light and history. But of all the spots over which the Black Shadow hung, the chief, for that night at least, was a certain undistinguished house in the narrow street which thousands who now dwell in London pass and repass, scarce observing it, every day of their lives, as they go and come along the thoroughfare of Holborn. At the door of one house in that quiet street, the horrid Shape watched; through that door he passed in towards midnight; and from that door, having done his work, he emerged before it was morning.

On the morrow—Saturday, the 25th of August—Mrs. Angell noticed that her lodger did not come down at the time expected. As he had lain longer than usual, however, on the day before, she was not alarmed. But, about eleven o'clock, her husband being then out, and Mrs. Wolfe having come in, she began to fear that something might be the matter; and she and Mrs. Wolfe went up stairs and knocked at the door. They listened a while, but there was no answer. They then tried to open the door, but found it was locked. Being then thoroughly alarmed, one of them ran down stairs, and called a man who chanced to be passing in the street, to come and break the door open. The man did so; and on entering they found the floor littered with small pieces of paper, and Chat-



terton "lying on the bed, with his legs hanging over, quite dead." The bed had not been lain in. The man took up some of the pieces of paper; and on one of them he read, in deceased's handwriting, the words, "I leave my soul to its Maker, my body to my mother and sister, and my curse to Bristol. If Mr. Ca :—" the rest was torn off. "The man then said," relates Mrs. Angell, "that he must have killed himself; which we did not think till then." Mrs. Wolfe ran immediately for Mr. Cross, who came, and was the first to point out a bottle on the window containing arsenic and water. "Some of the bits of arsenic were between his teeth;" so that there was no doubt that he had poisoned himself. The man who had broken open the door, and who was quite unknown to Mrs. Angell or Mrs. Wolfe, then went away, taking some of the little pieces of paper with him.

An inquest was held on the body at the Three Crows public-house, in Brooke Street, on Monday, the 27th of August, before Swinson Carter, Esq., Coroner, and the following jury:—Charles Skinner, — Meres, John Hollier, John Park, S. G. Doran, Henry Dugdale, G. J. Hillsley, C. Sheen, E. Manley, C. Moore, and — Nevett. The chief witnesses examined were Mary Angell, the landlady, her husband Frederick Angell, Mr. Cross, the apothecary, and Mrs. Wolfe. The facts which they deponed have been, each and all, involved in the preceding account.\* The jury, less charitable than juries

\* Readers who may be curious to see the notes of the depositions in the exact form in which they have come down to us, will find them in *Notes and Queries*, Vol. vii. p. 138. They were communicated to that periodical by John Matthew Gutch, Esq., of Worcester, formerly one of the proprietors of *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, and a resident in Bristol, the possessor of a large collection of papers, accumulated by himself and other persons, relating to Chatterton and his writings. The notes are communicated by Mr. Gutch as "from a MS. copy" in his possession, never before published. Unfortunately the history of this "MS. copy" is not traced. Unfortunately, we say: for there are some slight discrepancies between the account they contain and other accounts, which discrepancies one would like to see explained. Thus, in the printed copy in the *Notes and Queries*, the heading runs, "Account of an inquest held on, &c., on Friday, the 27th of August, 1770;" whereas the 27th was not a Friday, but a Monday. Again, in Mrs. Angell's evidence, as given in these MS. notes, the house in which she lived, and in which Chatterton died, is made to be 17, Brooke Street, instead of 4, Brooke Street, as the general tradition had always ran till Mr. Gutch published the notes. No. 17, unless the numbering has been changed, would have been at the inner or meaner end of Brooke Street, close to the market, but no corresponding house can now be pointed out there. Farther, Sir Herbert Croft, who, among his other attempts about the year

now-a-days, returned a verdict of *Felo de se*. In accordance with this verdict, the body, having been enclosed in a parish-shell, was privately interred, the following day, in the burying-ground attached to Shoe Lane Workhouse. This appears from the entry of the burial, under the date August 28th, in the parish-registers of St. Andrew's, Holborn, the parish in which Brooke Street is situated, and the church and *consecrated* churchyard of which are close to Shoe Lane. Mr. Peter Cunningham notices, as a coincidence, that the same parish-registers contain the entry of the baptism of Richard Savage, on the 18th of January, 1696-7; and he enhances the curiosity of the coincidence by remarking that Savage was born in Fox Court, Brooke Street, close to the house where Chatterton died, and died in 1743, in the jail of the very city of Bristol, where, nine years later, Chatterton was born. Brooke Street and Bristol exchanged their poets!

Whether Chatterton's body remained in the Shoe Lane burying-ground, to be torn up, with the bodies of other paupers, fifty years afterwards, when Farringdon Market usurped the site, is a point on which a question has been raised.

In or about the year 1808, George Cumberland, Esq., "descendant of Bishop Cumberland, and a literary and highly respectable man," was informed by Sir Robert Wilmot that at a basket-maker's in Bristol, whose name Sir Robert had forgotten, he had heard it positively stated that Chatterton was buried in the churchyard of St. Mary Redcliffe. Sir Robert

1789, to ascertain as much about the circumstances of Chatterton's death as possible, had taken care to see the coroner, found that he "had no minutes of the melancholy business," and had but a vague recollection of it at that distance of time; but was informed by him, on the evidence of such "memorandum" as he had, that the witnesses were Frederick Angell, *Mary Foster and William Hamsley*. Probably, if we could trace the history of Mr. Gutch's MS., these discrepancies would be explained without affecting its perfect authenticity. In all other respects, the statements in the MS. are singularly in accordance with the independent accounts obtained by Sir Herbert Croft, Warton, &c., from Mrs. Wolfe, Mr. Cross, &c. Accordingly, though we have followed the authority of this MS. to the utmost extent in which we could recognise it as authentic, the only effect it has had upon our narrative has been to add some touching particulars, especially in connexion with the closing days of Chatterton's life, which otherwise would have been wanting. With this exception, the narrative is substantially the same as it would have been had Mr. Gutch not published his document, but left us to the old sources of information.



farther said that the statement was made to him in such a manner that he believed it. Mr. Cumberland thereupon instituted inquiries in Bristol, so as to ascertain the truth of the story. For some time he could find no one who knew anything of the matter ; but at last he traced the information given to Sir Robert Wilmot, to a Mrs. Stockwell, the wife of a basket-maker in Peter Street. Questioned on the subject, she stated that, when a girl (apparently after Chatterton's death), she had been a pupil of Mrs. Chatterton's, and that she used to be frequently with her till she was twenty years old ; that often she stayed with Mrs. Chatterton and slept with her ; that she was "very kind and motherly," and told her many things she would not tell to others—among others, "how happy she was that her unfortunate boy was brought home and buried in Redcliffe." This had been done, she said, "through the attention of a relative in London, who, after the body had been cased in a parish-shell, had it secured and sent to her by the waggon." When the case arrived and was opened, the body was found "black and half-putrid ;" it was, therefore, interred immediately—this being done secretly by Phillips, the sexton, who was a friend of the family, and extremely fond of Chatterton. Mrs. Stockwell farther stated that the grave was "on the right hand side of the lime-tree, in the middle paved-walk in Redcliffe churchyard, about twenty feet from the father's grave, which was *in* the paved-walk, and where Mrs. Chatterton and Mrs. Newton also lay." She also recollected that Mrs. Chatterton had given leave to a person named Hutchinson or Taylor (she could not be sure which) to bury his child over her son's coffin ; and was very sorry afterwards that she had done so, as this person had not only put a stone over the grave which had formerly belonged to it, but had been removed and placed against the church-wall, but had also subsequently buried his wife in the same grave, and, on that occasion, erased the old inscription on the stone to make room for a new one. This was all that Mrs. Stockwell could tell ; but she mentioned to Mr. Cumberland that there was a Mrs. Kirkland, the wife of a Scotch naval man, who had formerly resided in Bristol, and been on

such very intimate terms with Mrs. Chatterton in her old age that she was likely to know all about the burial. Cumberland, on inquiry, found that this Mrs. Kirkland had died about three months before, leaving a daughter somewhere in London, whom he could not trace. But Mrs. Stockwell referred him to "a hatter's wife" (name not given) who remembered Mrs. Kirkland, and had often heard her say that Chatterton was privately buried in Redcliffe churchyard. To make the matter more sure, Mr. Cumberland sought out the family of the sexton Phillips, who had himself died in 1772. He found his sister, a Mrs. Jane Phillips, still alive; and she told him that she had known Chatterton well, and that her brother, the sexton, whom Chatterton used to call "uncle," was much attached to the family. It was her brother that first told her the news of Chatterton's having killed himself in London; and, on hearing it, she had gone, against her brother's wish, to Mrs. Chatterton, in order to know more about it. She asked Mrs. Chatterton where her son was buried; and she replied, "Ask me nothing; he is dead and buried." A daughter of the sexton's, now Mrs. Stephens, the wife of a cabinet-maker, was also found by Cumberland and interrogated. She said her father had never told her anything of the burial in Redcliffe churchyard; and "if he had done it privately, it was not likely that he would tell her, being very reserved on all occasions;" but she thought "he would not have refused, if asked, being attached to Chatterton and his mother." She remembered the removal of a stone from the church-wall, and the erasure of the old inscription to make room for a new one, by a person named Hutchinson, whose wife had died. A brother of this Mrs. Stephens, a son of the sexton, and named Stephen Chatterton Phillips, was also seen by Cumberland. He was then a retired sailor with a wooden leg, and was said to have some resemblance to Chatterton in the face. He but corroborated what his sister had said; that is, he knew nothing of the burial, and "his father was not likely to tell him, and yet might have done it." Finally, Cumberland saw Mrs. Edkins, already mentioned as having been so intimate with Mrs. Chatterton. As a Miss James, she had been at the

school kept by Chatterton's father, whom she remembered well; she had known Mrs. Chatterton then, and had been present afterwards at the birth of her son; and from the time of his birth, all through his school-boy period and his apprenticeship with Mr. Lambert, till he went to London, she had been continually seeing him and his mother. Some of the most interesting particulars of Chatterton's early life were procured from her. As to the private burial, however, she was unable to say anything. She had gone to see Mrs. Chatterton immediately after the news came of her son's death. On entering, she found Mrs. Chatterton in a fit of hysterics. She said she had come to ask about her health. "Ay," said Mrs. Chatterton, "and about something else;" on which she burst into tears, and they cried together, and "no more was said till they parted."

All these facts, collected by Cumberland about 1808, were given to him by Cromeek, the editor of "Burns's Reliques," who undertook to make farther researches and publish them. This was not done; and Cumberland's memoranda did not see the light till they were printed as an appendix to Mr. Dix's *Life of Chatterton* in 1851. Since that date they have received one slight corroboration. In the "Memorials of Canynge, &c.," published in 1854 by Mr. George Pryce, a Bristol antiquary, there is a short account of Chatterton; and in that account is included a letter written in 1853, by the late well-known Mr. Joseph Cottle, of Bristol, in which he states his belief that Chatterton was buried in Redcliffe churchyard. His reasons for the belief are thus stated:—"About forty years ago, Mr. George Cumberland called upon me and said, 'I have ascertained one important fact about Chatterton.' 'What is it?' I said. 'It is,' said he, 'that that marvellous boy was buried in Redcliffe churchyard.' He continued: 'I am just come from conversing with old Mrs. Edkins, a friend of Chatterton's mother. She affirmed to me this fact, with the following explanation:—'Mrs. Chatterton was passionately fond of her darling and only son, Thomas; and when she heard that he had destroyed himself, she immediately wrote to a relation of hers (the poet's uncle, then

residing in London), a carpenter, urging him to send home his body in a coffin or box. 'The box was accordingly sent down to Bristol; and when I called on my friend Mrs. Chatterton to condole with her, she, as a very great secret, took me upstairs and showed me the box; and removing the lid, I saw the poor boy, whilst his mother sobbed in silence. She told me that she should have him taken out in the middle of the night, and bury him in Redcliffe churchyard. Afterwards, when I saw her, she said she had managed it very well, so that none but the sexton and his assistant knew anything about it. This secrecy was necessary, as he could not be buried in consecrated ground.' " Mr. Cottle adds, that he knew the husband of Mrs. Edkins, who was a respectable painter and glazier.

There is some difference, it will be observed, between the account given in Mr. Cumberland's surviving memoranda and that given by Mr. Cottle as his recollection of what Mr. Cumberland had told him. In the one, Mrs. Edkins says nothing whatever about the private burial; in the other, she makes the detailed statement just quoted. Either, then, Mr. Cumberland had seen Mrs. Edkins a second time and got from her particulars which she had not thought fit to communicate in 1808, or there was a confusion between Mrs. Edkins and Mrs. Stockwell in Mr. Cottle's memory. On the whole, one would wish to believe the account, and to fancy the poor boy's bones resting quietly within the hallowed precincts he loved so well, and where, since 1840, the piety of Bristol has raised him a modest monument.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE JUDGMENT OF POSTERITY.

CHATTERTON'S death made very little sensation in London, beyond the immediate neighbourhood in which the inquest was held. We have looked over the newspapers of the time with some diligence; but, though paragraphs giving accounts of such casualties were as common then as now, we have not found the slightest reference to the suicide in Brooke Street,

The incident which figures in the newspapers as the chief metropolitan fact of the day on which the suicide occurred—*i.e.* the 24th of August—is the robbery at the foot of Highgate Hill, by “a tall thin man in a light-coloured coat, mounted on a black horse,” of the boy carrying the Chester mail. Under the same date is recorded, as a somewhat minor incident, a visit paid by their Majesties to Woolwich to see the artillery. Even the *Town and Country Magazine*, which came out, on the 31st of August, with three contributions in it from the pen of the unfortunate youth who was now no more, (and one of these the article on sculpture to accompany the engraved design for Beckford’s monument,) takes no notice in its “Domestic Intelligence” of the death of its correspondent. Doubtless, Hamilton knew the fact in time to notice it if he chose; but he may have known also the reference made to himself in Cross’s evidence at the inquest. Nor, in the September number, which likewise contains some of Chatterton’s writings, is the omission supplied. It is not till the October number that any notice of Chatterton occurs; and then it is in the form of an elegy in twenty-three stanzas, “To the Memory of Mr. Thomas Chatterton, late of Bristol.” The elegy is dated “Bristol, October, 1770,” and is signed “T. C.”—evidently the initials of Chatterton’s friend, Thomas Cary. The elegy is written with more of genuine affection than of poetry; but two stanzas may be quoted:—

“Think of his tender opening unfledged years,  
Brought to a final crisis ere mature,  
As Fate had grudged the wonders Nature rears,  
Bright genius in oblivion to immure.

Weep, Nature, weep : the mighty loss bewail ;—  
The wonder of our drooping isle is dead !  
Oh ! could but tears or plaintive sighs avail,  
By night and day would I bedew my bed.”

In consequence, however, of such communications as these sent from Bristol, and of the naturally increased interest that there would be there among the Catcotts and the Barretts in the Rowley manuscripts and other papers that Chatterton had left behind him; perhaps, too, of the researches of Dr. Fry and others who obtained copies of these papers and began to send

them about; and, doubtless, to some extent also, of the casual references to Chatterton's fate that would be made by persons who had seen him in town—it is certain that before the winter of 1770—1 was far advanced, the tragic death in the previous August of a certain youth of genius named Chatterton, a writer for the Magazines, and the alleged editor and transcriber of various pieces of ancient poetry, had become a topic of conversation in the literary clubs of London.

This was especially the case at the Gerard Street Club. Goldy had returned from his Parisian trip before the 8th of September—on which day, his biographer, Mr. Forster, finds him receiving a new suit of mourning from his tailor, to be worn on account of the death of his old mother, of which he had received the news when in Paris. Johnson was also back in town before September was over. One of the two—most probably it was Goldy—having seen the Elegy in the *Town and Country* for October, or otherwise coming across the story of Chatterton, made himself acquainted with the particulars; and thus Chatterton and the Rowley Poems came to be discussed at the Club. By this means it probably was that the Honourable Horace Walpole unexpectedly found himself, one day early in 1771, reminded of his Bristol correspondent of the year 1769. The occasion of his doing so was in itself a somewhat memorable one. The first annual dinner of the Royal Academy was held on St. George's Day (April 23d), 1771. At this dinner Sir Joshua Reynolds presided; and among the guests who sat under the pictures which were hung along the walls, were almost all the distinguished men of London. Walpole, who was not in the habit of seeing much of Johnson, Goldsmith, and that set elsewhere, found himself seated near to them. We will let himself relate the rest. "Dining," he says, "at the Royal Academy, Doctor Goldsmith drew the attention of the company with an account of a marvellous treasure of ancient poems lately discovered at Bristol, and expressed enthusiastic belief in them, for which he was laughed at by Dr. Johnson, who was present. I soon found this was the *trouvaille* of my friend Chatterton; and I told Dr. Goldsmith that this novelty was known to me,



who might, if I had pleased, have had the honour of ushering the great discovery to the learned world. You may imagine, Sir, we did not all agree in the measure of our faith; but though his credulity diverted me, my mirth was soon dashed; for, on asking about Chatterton, he told me he had been in London and had destroyed himself. The persons of honour and veracity who were present will attest with what surprise and concern I thus first heard of his death." Said we not that, of all the literary men then alive, the one that it might have been best for Chatterton to have near him, in his hour of despair, was Oliver Goldsmith? We see that, after Chatterton was dead, Goldsmith was somehow the first to hear of his fate and to talk about it.

From that time, for the next six or seven years, we are to fancy the interest in the Rowley Poems, and in Chatterton as connected with them, gradually increasing. Catcott, as possessor of the greater portion of Chatterton's transcripts of the supposed ancient poems, has become a person of some consequence in the eyes of local antiquarians, and he takes care to make the most of it. He has already increased his stock of MSS. by buying from Chatterton's mother, for five guineas, such of his papers as had been left with her,—a proceeding by no means to his credit, when we know that about the same time he offered to sell his own collection for 70*l*. Barrett, too, as the possessor of some copies of the supposed antiques, finds himself inquired after. Both he and Catcott lend about copies of their manuscripts, some fragments of which get into print. The Bristol poems of the fifteenth century are frequently spoken of in literary circles in London. Warton, for example, was shown a collection of them in 1773 by the Earl of Lichfield, who asked his opinion of their genuineness. All sensible persons who had seen specimens had already made up their minds that they were forgeries; but many antiquarian old women stoutly maintained the contrary. Whenever a literary man from the metropolis was in the neighbourhood of Bristol, he endeavoured, as a matter of course, to see Catcott and Barrett, and to get all the particulars from them about Chatterton and

his circumstances. They were very communicative on this subject, and spoke of Chatterton's talents, now that they had a kind of property in them, far more enthusiastically than they had done when he was alive; but they, and indeed nearly all Bristol, persisted in believing in the genuineness of the antiques. Chatterton, they said, was a youth of extraordinary genius; but he could not have produced such poems as these were! They were, they had no doubt of it, the works of the much older Bristol poet, Thomas Rowley; mysteriously preserved for three hundred years in the old chests in the muniment-room of St. Mary Redcliffe, and only brought to light by Chatterton! Thus, when in April 1776 Johnson and Boswell paid a visit to Bristol, they saw Catcott and Barrett, and were shown the original MSS. Johnson, says Boswell, read some of them aloud, while Catcott stood by with open mouth, amazed at his scepticism; after which, Catcott, to settle the matter, led them in triumph to the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe, and, by way of unanswerable argument, showed them "the chest itself." It was on this occasion that Johnson said to Boswell, speaking of Chatterton, "This is the most extraordinary young man that has encountered my knowledge. It is wonderful how the whelp has written such things." In connexion with this same visit, it may be interesting to state that Hannah More, who was still residing in Bristol with her sisters, a young woman of twenty-five, at the time of Chatterton's death, had, between that time and Dr. Johnson's visit in 1776, added to the literary reputation of Bristol by the publication of her first dramas. In visiting Bristol, Johnson was paying a compliment to this rising poetess, as well as to the memory of Chatterton. One is glad to know also that, if Hannah More, as one of the conductors of the best boarding-school for young ladies in Bristol, was almost necessarily out of the circle of Chatterton's acquaintances, while he was going about in the city as an attorney's apprentice, she was one of the first in Bristol to show an interest in his fate after she did hear of him, and to prove that interest by being kind to his mother and sister. Mrs. Chatterton, after her son's death, was seized with a nervous

illness, which, though she lived a good many years longer, never left her; and among those who used to go to see her and sometimes take tea with her, for her dead son's sake, there was none, Mrs. Stockwell said, whom she respected so much as Miss More.

It was in 1777 that the Rowley Poems were first published collectively, chiefly from the manuscripts in possession of Catcott and Barrett. A second and more splendid edition was published in 1782 by Dean Milles, President of the Society of Antiquaries, with the following title:—“*Poems supposed to have been written at Bristol in the Fifteenth Century, by Thomas Rowley, Priest, &c. ; with a Commentary, in which the antiquity of them is considered and defended by Jeremiah Milles, D.D., Dean of Exeter.*” Dean Milles, in his preliminary dissertation on the poems, gave a very slight account of Chatterton, with a view to show that he could not have been their author. Immediately on the publication of the volume, there blazed out a Rowley controversy, as fierce as that which had attended the appearance of the Ossian poems. Bryant and one or two others sided with Milles; and the question was argued and re-argued in every shape; but all the great critical and antiquarian authorities, such as Malone, Tyrwhitt, and Warton, were on the other side, and their arguments, from evidence external and internal, set the question conclusively at rest in the minds of all who could be set at rest about anything. The collection and publication about the same time of Chatterton's acknowledged miscellanies, helped somewhat in the demonstration, by showing the *possibility* that their author might also have been the author even of things so extraordinary as the Rowley Poems. It was not till 1803, however, that the two sets of pieces were printed, together with additions, as the undoubted works of Chatterton. This first complete edition of Chatterton's works was undertaken in 1799 by subscription, with a view to raise a sum for the benefit of his sister, then Mrs. Newton; his mother being by that time dead. Mr. Southey and Mr. Cottle of Bristol acted as the editors. The subscription, however, not reaching the

expenses of publication, an arrangement was made with Messrs. Longman in the interest of Mrs. Newton. According to what Mr. Cumberland heard in Bristol in 1808, the result of this speculation, and of other similar acts of kindness shown to the Chatterton family since the fatal year which had made them immortal, was that a sum of about 600*l.* came after Mrs. Newton's death to her only daughter, who had for some time been in the service of Miss Hannah More. This girl, the last of the Chattertons, died in 1807, leaving 100*l.* to a young man, an attorney, to whom she was about to be married. The rest went to her father's relatives, the Newtons, living in London somewhere about the Minories.

We have already quoted enough from Chatterton's acknowledged writings in prose and in verse, to give an idea of his ability and versatility as there shown. They are certainly astonishing productions for a boy not past his eighteenth year; astonishing for their very variety, and their precocious tone and manner, even where in substance they are most worthless. He writes political letters for the newspapers, shallow enough, but as good as were going; he writes scurrilous satires in the Churchill vein, with here and there lines as good as any in Churchill, and sometimes with turns of epigram reminding us of Pope; he writes very tolerable imitations of Ossian, and elegies, and serious poems showing some power both of thought and imagination; he catches the knack of magazine-articles, and scribbles them off, *currente calamo*, exactly of a kind to suit; he goes an evening or two to Marylebone Gardens, and straightway he writes a capital burletta. On the evidence, then, of his acknowledged productions alone, Chatterton must be pronounced to have been a youth of singular endowments, who, had he lived, would certainly have made himself a name in the literature of England at the close of the last and the beginning of the present century. The passages which we have hitherto quoted from these productions having, however, been selected mainly as affording illustrations of his character

and life, it may be well to cite one or two more, exhibiting rather his poetical powers as such. Here is a piece entitled "An Elegy."

"Joyless I seek the solitary shade,  
 Where dusky Contemplation veils the scene;  
 The dark retreat, of leafless branches made,  
 Where sickening sorrow wets the yellow'd green.  
 The darksome ruins of some sacred cell,  
 Where erst the sons of Superstition trod,  
 Tott'ring upon the mossy meadow, tell,  
 We better know, but less adore, our God.  
 Now, as I mournful tread the gloomy cave,  
 Thro' the wide window, once with mysteries dight,  
 The distant forest, and the darken'd wave  
 Of the swoln Avon ravishes my sight.  
 But see! the thick'ning veil of Evening's drawn,  
 The azure changes to a sable blue,  
 The rapturing prospects fly the less'ning lawn,  
 And Nature seems to mourn the dying view.  
 Self-sprighted Fear creeps silent thro' the gloom,  
 Starts at the rustling leaf and rolls his eyes;  
 Aghast with horror, when he views the tomb,  
 With every torment of a hell he flies.  
 The bubbling brooks in plaintive murmurs roll;  
 The bird of omen, with incessant scream,  
 To melancholy thoughts awakes the soul,  
 And lulls the mind to Contemplation's dream.  
 A dreary stillness broods o'er all the vale;  
 The clouded moon emits a feeble glare;  
 Joyless I seek the darkling hill and dale:  
 Where'er I wander, sorrow still is there."

This is by no means perfect, but it is in a vein of true poetry; and both the melancholy of the mood, and the tendency to personification, as in "Self-sprighted Fear," are very characteristic of Chatterton. The following, also a fine instance of personification, is from another Elegy which contains many good stanzas:—

"Pale, rugged Winter, bending o'er his tread;—  
 His grizzled hair bedropt with icy dew;  
 His eyes a dusky light congeal'd and dead;  
 His robe a tinge of bright ethereal blue!  
 His train a motleyed, sanguine sable cloud,  
 He limps along the russet dreary moor,  
 While rising whirlwinds, blasting keen and loud,  
 Roll the white surges to the sounding shore."

There is a satirical description of Whitfield preaching, which, if we were to quote from it, might remind readers of some of Burns's humorous pieces on the New-light preachers

of Ayrshire. What we have already quoted from the *Burletta*, however, must suffice in this vein.

It must not be supposed, however, that there are many passages so good as the above in Chatterton's acknowledged poems. There is not one of them that is not clever; and from the longer ones there might be selected instances of nervous and epigrammatic expression, and of sudden strokes of fancy, which would have done credit to any veteran writer of the time. But, upon the whole, except as bearing on the life and character of their extraordinary author, these poems possess little interest; and, were an editor to go over them now, with a view to select such portions of them as, apart from the peculiar circumstances of their authorship, might be entitled to preservation in a collected edition of extracts from the English poets, all that he could find in them suitable for his purpose might be comprised in a very few printed pages.

It is very different with the antique pieces written in the names of Rowley and of other poets. Whether, in the composition of these poems, it was Chatterton's habit first to write in ordinary phraseology, and then, by the help of glossaries, to translate what he had written into archaic language, or whether he had by practice become so far master of ancient words and expressions as to be able to write directly in the fictitious dialect he had prescribed for himself, certain it is that, whenever his thoughts and fancies attained their highest strain, he either was whirled into the archaic form by an irresistible instinct, or deliberately adopted it. Up to a certain point, as it were, Chatterton could remain himself; but the moment he was hurried past that point, the moment he attained to a certain degree of sublimity, or fervour, or solemnity in his conceptions, and was constrained to continue at the same pitch, at that moment he reverted to the fifteenth century, and passed into the soul of Rowley. No one who has not read the antique poems of Chatterton can conceive what extraordinary things they are. Feeling this, and feeling that all that we have written about Chatterton hitherto would be out of proportion,



unless we could communicate some idea of the force of his genius as shown in his Rowley antiques, we shall close this sketch of his life with a slight account of these poems, and with a few extracts from them.

The antique poems, as printed in Southey's edition of Chatterton's works in 1803, occupy one octavo volume out of three. The following is a descriptive list of the most important of them : -

1. *Four Eclogues*, or supposed poetical dialogues of shepherds and shepherdesses at different periods in the past history of England chiefly about the period of the Wars of the Roses. The first three of the Eclogues were printed from MSS. in Chatterton's writing in the possession of Mr. Catcott, to whom they had been given as transcripts of old poems by Rowley; the fourth was published in the *Town and Country Magazine* for May, 1769, with this title, "Elmoure and Jaga; written three hundred years ago by T. Rowley, secular priest."

2. *The Parliament of Sprytes* - "A most merrie Entyrlude, plaied by the Carmelyte Freeres at Mastre Canynges hys greete howse, before Mastre Canynges and Byshopppe Carpenterre, on Jedicatyng the Chyrche of Oure Ladie of Redcliffe; wroten by T. Rowleis and J. Iscammie." Printed from Mr. Barrett's History of Bristol: the original, in Chatterton's handwriting, in the British Museum.

3. *The Tournament* : A dramatic account by Rowley of a Tournament, held at Bristol before Edward I. in 1285, in which Sir Simon Burton, one of the old worthies of Bristol, and the original founder of the Church of St. Mary Redcliffe, which Canynge rebuilt, showed his prowess over all other knights. Printed from a copy made by Catcott from one in Chatterton's handwriting.

4. *The Bristowe Tragedie, or the Dethe of Sir Charles Baldwin* - A ballad, in nearly a hundred stanzas, celebrating the death of Sir Charles Baldwin, otherwise Sir Baldwin Fulford, a zealous Lancastrian, who was executed at Bristol, in 1461, by order of Edward IV. The poem was printed in London, in 1772, from a copy made by Catcott from one in Chatterton's handwriting. Chatterton, it appears, acknowledged to his mother and sister that he was the author of this poem.

5. *The Storie of William Canynge* : A poem in twenty-five stanzas, purporting to be extracted from a prose work by Rowley, giving an account of eminent natives of Bristol, from the earliest times to his own. The first thirty-four lines of this poem are extant on the "original vellum," given by Chatterton to Mr. Barrett, the rest is from various transcripts.

6. *Songe to Ælla, Lorde of the Castel of Brystowe ynnre daies of yore* - A short Pindaric lyric by Rowley, to the memory of Ælla, the great Saxon chieftain of West England, and enemy of the Danes in the tenth century. Printed from the Catcott MSS.

7. *Ælla* - "A Tragycal Enterlude, or Discoorseynge Tragedie, wrotenn by Thomas Rowleis, plaiedd before Mastre Canynge, atte hys howse neypte the Rodde Lodge, alsoe before the Duke of Norfolck, Johan Howard." This is Chatterton's masterpiece. It is a long dramatic poem in various rhyme, with songs interspersed, originally printed from a manuscript in Chatterton's hand, in the possession of Mr. Catcott. The hero of the drama is the aforesaid Ælla, the Saxon lord of Bristol in the tenth century, and the hammer of the then invading Danes. The plot is this - Ælla has just married the beautiful Burtha, and is feasting at Bristol in all the joy of his spousals, when the news is brought that two hosts of the Danes, under Magnus and Hurra, are ravaging the country round. Ælla tears himself away from Burtha; meets the Danes; totally defeats Magnus and his host, and drives Hurra and his host skulking

into the woods. He is in the pride of his victory when his friend Celmonde, who has been secretly in love with BIRTHA, steals from the camp, and going to Bristol alone, tells BIRTHA that her husband is sorely wounded, and wishes her to come to him. BIRTHA mounts a horse immediately; and not waiting to inform her maidens of her purpose, rides off with Celmonde. They go through a wood; where, as Celmonde is revealing his purpose and offering violence, Hurra and his Danes come to the rescue, slay him, and magnanimously protect BIRTHA. They escort her to Bristol; where, meanwhile, however, ÆLLA has arrived, and thinking his BIRTHA false, has stabbed himself. He survives to see her, and then dies; and she swoons on his body.

8. *Goddwynn*: "A Tragedie, by Thomas Rowleie." This poem, also from the Catcott MSS., is a fragment of a supposed tragedy, the scene of which is laid in England immediately before the Norman Conquest, and the chief persons in which are Earl Godwin, Harold, and King Edward the Confessor. The topic of the drama, so far as it proceeds, is the patriotic rage of the Saxons at the growing power of the Normans in the land.

9. *The Balade of Charitie*: "As wroten bie the gode prieste Thomas Rowleie, 1464." This poem, originally printed from a professed copy in Chatterton's handwriting in the possession of Mr. Barrett, is a kind of narrative phantasy, describing a pilgrim overtaken by a storm. A rich abbot passes him, and refuses him an alms; but a poor "Limitour" friar, who has little to spare, acts a more brotherly part.

10. *The Battle of Hastings*: A long rhymed description, in two parts, of the supposed incidents of the great battle by which Duke William became master of England. The poem purported to be a translation by Rowley of a metrical narrative by Turgot, a Saxon monk, contemporary with the Conquest. Chatterton, when hard pressed, however, had admitted to Mr. Barrett that the first part was his own.

These antique poems of Chatterton (and there are about twenty shorter ones in the same series) are, perhaps, as worthy of being read consecutively as some corresponding portions of the poetry of Byron, Shelley, or Keats. There are passages in them, at least, quite equal to any to be found in these poets; and it is only the uncouth and spurious appearance of antiquity which they wear when the absurd spelling in which they were first printed is retained, that prevents them from being known and quoted. Let us strip a few passages, as far as is possible without changing the words, of this unnecessary concealment. Here is a passage, with the spelling partly modernized, from the *Balade of Charitie*:—

"In Virginé the sweltry sun 'gan sheen,  
And hot upon the mees did cast his ray;  
The apple rudded from its paly green,  
And the moll' pear did bend his leafy spray;  
The peed chelandrie<sup>2</sup> sung the livelong day;  
'Twas now the pride, the manhood of the year,  
And eke the ground was dight in its most deft aumere.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Soft pear.

<sup>2</sup> Pied goldfinch.

<sup>3</sup> Becoming mantle.

The sun was gleaming in the mid of day ;  
 Dead still the air, and eke the welkin blue,  
 When from the sea aris in drear array  
 A heap of clouds of sable sullen hue ;  
 The which full fast unto the woodland drew,  
 Hiltring atenes<sup>1</sup> the sunne's fetive face ;  
 And the black tempest swoln and gathered up apace.

Beneath an holm, fast by a pathway-side,  
 Which did unto Saint Godwin's convent lead,  
 A hapless pilgrim moaning did abide,  
 Poor in the view, ungentle in his weed,  
 Long bretful<sup>2</sup> of the miseries of need.  
 Where from the hail-stones could the almer fly ?  
 He had no housen there, ne any convent nigh !

Look in his glommèd<sup>3</sup> face, his spright there scan :  
 How woe-begone, how withered, forwend,<sup>4</sup> dead !  
 Haste to thy church-glebe-house, ashrewed man !<sup>5</sup>  
 Haste to thy kist,<sup>6</sup> thy only dortour-bed :<sup>7</sup>  
 Cale as the clay which will gré on thy head  
 Is charity and love among high elves :  
 Knightés and barons live for pleasure and themselves.

The gathered storm is ripe ; the big drops fall ;  
 The forswat meadows smee<sup>8</sup> and drench with rain ;  
 The coming ghastrness does the cattle pall ;  
 And the full flocks are driving o'er the plain ;  
 Dash'd from the clouds the waters float again ;  
 The welkin opes ; the yellow levin flies ;  
 And the hot fiery smoth in the wide lowings dies.<sup>9</sup>

List ! how the thunder's rattling climming<sup>10</sup> sound  
 Cheeves slowly on, and then embollen clangs,<sup>11</sup>  
 Shakes the high spire, and, lost, dispended, drowned,  
 Still on the galliard ear of terror hangs.<sup>12</sup>  
 The winds are up ; the lofty elmen swangs ;  
 Again the levin and the thunder pours,  
 And the full clouds are burst atenes in stonen showers."

This may serve as a specimen of the descriptive passages with which the poems abound. Here are a few samples of maxim and thought tersely expressed :—

"Plays made from halie tales I hold unmeet ;  
 Let some great story of a man be sung."

"Verse may be good, but poetry wants more."

"Strange doom it is that in these days of ours  
 Nought but a bare recital can have place :  
 Now shapely Poesy hath lost its powers,  
 And pinant<sup>13</sup> History is only grace."

"But then renown eterne !—It is but air  
 Bred in the phantásie, and allene living there."

<sup>1</sup> Shrouding at once.      <sup>2</sup> Brimful.      <sup>3</sup> Clouded face.      <sup>4</sup> Sapless.

<sup>5</sup> Accursed man.      <sup>6</sup> Coffin.      <sup>7</sup> Dormitory.      <sup>8</sup> Sun-burnt meadows smoke.

<sup>9</sup> Fiery steam : wide flamings.      <sup>10</sup> Noisy.      <sup>11</sup> Moves slowly : swollen clangs.

<sup>12</sup> Frighted ear.      <sup>13</sup> Languid History.

Still murmuring at their schap,<sup>1</sup> still to the king  
 They roll their troubles like a surgy sea.  
 Han England, then, a tongue, but not a sting?  
 Doth all complain, yet none will righted be?"

"Virgin and halie saints, who sit in glour,  
 Or give the mighty will, or give the good man power."

"And both together sought the unknown shore,  
 Where we shall go, where many's gone before."

"So have I seen a mountain-oak that long  
 Has cast his shadow to the mountain side,  
 Brave all the winds, though ever they so strong,  
 And view the briars below with self-taught pride;  
 But when thrown down by mighty thunder-stroke,  
 He'd rather be a briar than an oak."

The following is a personification worthy of Spenser:—

"Hope, holy sister, sweeping through the sky, *v. F.Q. iii. xii. 13.*  
 In crown of gold and robe of lily white,  
 Which far abroad in gentle air doth fly,  
 Meeting from distance the enjoyous sight;  
 Albeit oft thou takest thy high flight  
 Heckèd in mist,<sup>2</sup> and with thine eyne yblent."<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps, however, it is in the lyrical pieces scattered through the poems that Chatterton's genius is seen at its best. Here is *Rowley's Song to Ælla*:—

"Oh thou, or what remains of thee,  
 Ælla, the darling of futurity,  
 Let this my song bold as thy courage be,  
 As everlasting to posterity!

When Dacia's sons, whose hairs of blood-red hue,  
 Like kingcups bursting with the morning dew,  
 Arranged in drear array,  
 Upon the lethal day,  
 Spread far and wide on Watchet's shore,  
 Then didst thou furious stand,  
 And by thy valiant hand,  
 Besprengèd all the mees with gore.

Drawn by thine anlace<sup>4</sup> fell,  
 Down to the depths of hell  
 Thousands of Dacians went;  
 Bristowans, men of might,  
 Ydared the bloody fight,  
 And acted deeds full quaint.

Oh thou, where'er (thy bones at rest)  
 Thy spirit to haunt delighteth best,  
 Whether upon the blood-imbruèd plain,  
 Or where thou kenst from far  
 The dismal cry of war,  
 Or seest some mountain made of corse of slain;  
 Or seest the hatchèd<sup>5</sup> steed  
 Yprancing on the meed,  
 And neigh to be among the pointed spears;

<sup>1</sup> Fate. <sup>2</sup> Shrouded in mist. <sup>3</sup> Eyes blinded. <sup>4</sup> Sword. <sup>5</sup> Accoutred.

The sun was gleaming in the mid of day ;  
 Dead still the air, and eke the welkin blue,  
 When from the sea aris in drear array  
 A heap of clouds of sable sullen hue ;  
 The which full fast unto the woodland dore.  
 Hiltring atenes<sup>1</sup> the sunne's feticive face<sup>2</sup> fire ;  
 And the black tempest swoln and gathere<sup>3</sup> round ;

Beneath an holm, fast by a path<sup>4</sup> world expire."  
 Which did unto Saint Godwin's  
 A hapless pilgrim meaning di<sup>5</sup> imagination turn to the  
 Poor in the view, ungentle i<sup>6</sup> song, supposed to be sung  
 Long bretful<sup>7</sup> of the miser<sup>8</sup> by one of Ælla's minstrels.  
 Where from the hail-sto<sup>9</sup>  
 He had no housen there, ne

Look in his glomm<sup>10</sup> into Ælla, purports to be by  
 How woe-begone. Rowley :—  
 Haste to thy ch<sup>11</sup> was sitting,  
 Haste to thy k<sup>12</sup> she harried,<sup>13</sup>  
 Cale as the c<sup>14</sup> hands white hosen was knitting,  
 Is charity a<sup>15</sup> is to be married !  
 Knightés and !

The gat<sup>16</sup>  
 The fo<sup>17</sup>  
 The c<sup>18</sup>  
 And  
 Da<sup>19</sup>  
 T<sup>20</sup>  
 And +

It looked like Thomas, a forester bold,  
 In our ch<sup>21</sup> or the basket,  
 As a chimney from Elinour hold ;  
 I love it as well as I ask it.  
 When I had with my father in merry Cloud-dell,  
 He was at my lief to mind spinning,  
 He told me something, but what ne could tell,  
 I had wanted something, but what ne could tell,  
 My father's barb'd hall han ne winning.<sup>22</sup>  
 That evening I rise do I set my maidens,  
 Some to spin, some to cardle, some bleaching ;  
 Of my new entered do ask for mine aidens,  
 How would you find me a-teaching.  
 Lord Walter, my father, he lovèd me well,  
 And nothing unto me was needing ;  
 But should I again go to merry Cloud-dell,  
 In another 'twould be without reding.<sup>23</sup>

She said, and lord Thomas came over the lea,  
 As he the fat deerkins was chasing ;  
 She put by her knitting, and to him went she ;  
 So we leave them both kindly embracing.<sup>24</sup>

The following, in another strain, is also one of the lyrics  
 sung by the minstrels in Ælla. It is the song of a bereaved  
 maiden :—

"O, sing unto my roundelay,  
 O, drop the briny tear with me,  
 Dance ne moe at halie-day,  
 Like a running river be.  
 My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

<sup>1</sup> All shining.  
<sup>2</sup> Had no charms.

<sup>3</sup> Arbour.

<sup>4</sup> Hastened.  
<sup>5</sup> Straightway.

<sup>6</sup> Marks in archery.

<sup>7</sup> Advice.

as the winter-night,  
 he summer snow,  
 rning light;  
 rave below.  
 is dead,  
 o his death-bed,  
 under the willow-tree.

tongue as the throstle's note,  
 dance as thought can be,  
 as tabour, cudgel stout,  
 e lies by the willow-tree.  
 My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

Hark ! the raven flaps his wing  
 In the briared dell below ;  
 Hark ! the death-owl loud doth sing  
 To the nightmares as they go.  
 My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

See ! the white moon shines on high ;  
 Whiter is my true love's shroud,  
 Whiter than the morning-sky,  
 Whiter than the evening-cloud.  
 My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

Here, upon my true love's grave,  
 Shall the barren flowers be laid ;  
 Ne one halie saint to save  
 All the celness<sup>3</sup> of a maid.  
 My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

With my hands I'll dent<sup>4</sup> the briars,  
 Round his halie corse to gree ;  
 Ouphant,<sup>5</sup> fairy, light your fires ;  
 Here my body still shall be.  
 My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

Come with acorn-cup and thorn ;  
 Drain my hearte's blood away ;  
 Life and all its good I scorn,  
 Dance by night, or feast by day.  
 My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

<sup>1</sup> Hair.<sup>2</sup> Neck.<sup>3</sup> Coldness.<sup>4</sup> Fasten.<sup>5</sup> Elfin.



Or in black armour stalk around  
 Embattled Bristowe, once thy ground,  
 And glow ardúrous<sup>1</sup> on the castle-stairs ;  
 Or fiery round the minster glare ;  
 Let Bristowe still be made thy care.  
 Guard it from foemen and consuming fire ;  
 Like Avon's stream encirc it round ;  
 Ne let a flame enharm the ground,  
 Till in one flame all the whole world expire."

From this piece of powerful imagination turn to the following exquisitely dainty little song, supposed to be sung for the entertainment of Birtha by one of *Ælla's* minstrels. The song, though introduced into *Ælla*, purports to be by Sir Tibbot Gorges, and not by Rowley :—

"As Elinour by the green lessel<sup>2</sup> was sitting,  
 As from the sun's heatè she harried,<sup>3</sup>  
 She said, as her white hands white hosen was knitting,  
 'What pleasure it is to be married !  
 'My husband, lord Thomas, a forester bold,  
 As ever clove pin<sup>4</sup> or the basket,  
 Does no cherisaunces from Elinour hold ;  
 I have it as soon as I ask it.  
 'When I lived with my father in merry Cloud-dell,  
 Tho' 'twas at my lief to mind spinning,  
 I still wanted something, but what ne could tell,  
 My lord-father's barb'd hall han ne winning.<sup>5</sup>  
 'Each morning I rise do I set my maidens,  
 Some to spin, some to cardle, some bleaching ;  
 Gif any new entered do ask for mine aidens,  
 Then swithen<sup>6</sup> you find me a-teaching.  
 'Lord Walter, my father, he lovèd me well,  
 And nothing unto me was needing ;  
 But should I again go to merry Cloud-dell,  
 In soother 'twould be without reding.'<sup>7</sup>  
 She said, and lord Thomas came over the lea,  
 As he the fat deerkins was chasing ;  
 She put by her knitting, and to him went she ;  
 So we leave them both kindly embracing."

The following, in another strain, is also one of the lyrics sung by the minstrels in *Ælla*. It is the song of a bereaved maiden :—

"O, sing unto my roundelay,  
 O, drop the briny tear with me,  
 Daunce ne moe at halie-day,  
 Like a running river be.  
 My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

<sup>1</sup> All blazing.<sup>2</sup> Arbour.<sup>3</sup> Hastened.<sup>4</sup> Marks in archery.<sup>5</sup> Had no charms.<sup>6</sup> Straightway.<sup>7</sup> Advice.

Black his crine<sup>1</sup> as the winter-night,  
 White his rood<sup>2</sup> as the summer snow,  
 Rud his face as the morning light;  
 Cold he lies in the grave below.

My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

Sweet his tongue as the throstle's note,  
 Quick in dance as thought can be,  
 Deft his tabour, cudgel stout,  
 O, he lies by the willow-tree.

My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

Hark ! the raven flaps his wing  
 In the briared dell below ;  
 Hark ! the death-owl loud doth sing  
 To the nightmares as they go.

My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

See ! the white moon shines on high ;  
 Whiter is my true love's shroud,  
 Whiter than the morning-sky,  
 Whiter than the evening-cloud.

My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

Here, upon my true love's grave,  
 Shall the barren flowers be laid ;  
 Ne one halie saint to save  
 All the celness<sup>3</sup> of a maid.

My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

With my hands I'll dent<sup>4</sup> the briars,  
 Round his halie corse to gree ;  
 Ouphant,<sup>5</sup> fairy, light your fires ;  
 Here my body still shall be.

My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

Come with acorn-cup and thorn ;  
 Drain my hearte's blood away ;  
 Life and all its good I scorn,  
 Dance by night, or feast by day.

My love is dead,  
 Gone to his death-bed,  
 All under the willow-tree.

<sup>1</sup> Hair.<sup>2</sup> Neck.<sup>3</sup> Coldness.<sup>4</sup> Fasten.<sup>5</sup> Elfin.

Water-witches, crowned with raita,<sup>1</sup>  
 Bear me to your lethal tide :  
 I die ! I come ! my true love waits.  
 — Thus the damsel spake, and died.

But perhaps the grandest thing in all Chatterton is his fragmentary Ode to Liberty in his *Tragedy of Godwin*. We know nothing finer in its kind in the whole range of English poetry. A chorus is supposed to sing the song ; which is throughout, it will be seen, a burst of glorious and sustained personification :—

When Freedom, drest in blood-stained vest,  
 To every knight her war-song sung,  
 Upon her head wild weeds were spread,  
 A gory anlace<sup>2</sup> by her hung.  
     She danced on the heath ;  
     She heard the voice of Death ;  
 Pale-eyed Affright, his heart of silver hue,  
 In vain assailed her bosom to acale.<sup>3</sup>  
 She heard unflemed<sup>4</sup> the shrieking voice of woe,  
 And sadness in the owlet shake the dale.  
     She shook the burlèd<sup>5</sup> spear ;  
     On high she jeest<sup>6</sup> her shield ;  
     Her foemen all appear,  
     And flizz along the field.  
 Power, with his heafod straught<sup>7</sup> into the skies,  
 His spear a sun-beam, and his shield a star,  
 Alike tway breming gronfires<sup>8</sup> rolls his eyes,  
 Chafts with his iron feet and sounds to war.  
     She sits upon a rock ;  
     She bends before his spear ;  
     She rises from the shock,  
     Wielding her own in air.  
 Hard as the thunder doth she drive it on ;  
 Wit skilly wimpled<sup>9</sup> guides it to his crown ;  
 His long sharp spear, his spreading shield is gone ;  
 He falls, and falling rolleth thousands down.  
 War, gore-faced War, by envy burl'd,<sup>10</sup> arist  
 His fiery helm nodding to the air,  
 Ten bloody arrows in his straining fist."

\* \* \* \*

What a picture in the last line ! With no other evidence before us than is afforded by this and the other antique pieces which we have quoted, one may assert unhesitatingly, not only that Chatterton was a true English poet of the eighteenth century, but also that, compared with the other English poets of the part of that century immediately prior to the new era

<sup>1</sup> Rushes.<sup>2</sup> Sword.<sup>3</sup> Freeze.<sup>4</sup> Unterrified.<sup>5</sup> Armed.<sup>6</sup> Tossed.<sup>7</sup> Head stretched.<sup>8</sup> Two burning meteors.<sup>9</sup> Closely covered.<sup>10</sup> Armed.

begun by Burns and Wordsworth, he was, with all his immaturity, almost solitary in the possession of the highest poetic gift. Pope, Thomson, and Goldsmith, were poets of this century; and no sensible man will for a moment think of comparing the boy of Bristol, in respect of his whole activity, with these fine stars of our literature, or even with some of the lesser stars that shone along with them. But he had a specific fire and force of imagination in him which they had not; and when one remembers that he was but seventeen years and nine months old when he died, and that most of his antiques were written fully a year before that time, little wonder that, with Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Keats, one looks back again and again on his brief existence with a kind of awe, as on the track of a heaven-shot meteor earthwards through a night of gloom.

## WORDSWORTH.\*

ANOTHER great spirit has recently gone from the midst of us. It is now three months since the nation heard, with a deep though quiet sadness, that an aged man of venerable mien, who for fifty years had borne worthily the name of English poet, had at length disappeared from those scenes of lake and mountain, where, in stately care of his own worth, he had fixed his recluse abode, and passed forward, one star the more, into the still unfeatured future, whither all that lives is rolling, and whither, as he well knew and believed, the Shakespeares and Miltons, whom men count dead, had but as yesterday transferred their kindred radiance. When the news spread, it seemed as if our island were suddenly a man the poorer, as if some pillar or other notable object, long conspicuous on its broad surface, had suddenly fallen down. It is right, then, that we should detain our thoughts for a little in the vicinity of this event; that, the worldly course of such a man having now been ended, we should stand for a little around his grave, and think solemnly of what he was. Neither few nor unimportant, we may be sure, are the reflections that should suggest themselves over the grave of William Wordsworth.

Of the various mysteries that the human mind can contemplate, none is more baffling, and at the same time more charming to the understanding, than the nature of that law which determines the differences of power and mental manifestation between age and age. That all history is an evolution, that each generation inherits all that had been accumulated by its predecessor, and bequeathes in turn all that itself contains to

\* NORTH BRITISH REVIEW: *August*, 1850.—*The Poetical Works of WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, D.C.L., Poet Laureate, &c.* London, 1849.

its successor, is an idea to which, in one form or another, science binds us down. But, native as this idea now is in all cultivated minds, with how many facts, and with what a large proportion of our daily speech, does it not still stand in apparent contradiction! Looking back upon the past career of our race, does not the eye single out, as by instinct, certain epochs that are epochs of virtue and glory, and others that are epochs of frivolity and shame? Do we not speak of the age of Pericles in Greece, of the Augustan age in Rome, of the outburst of chivalry in modern Europe, of the noble era of Elizabeth in England, and of the sad decrepitude that followed it? And is there not a certain justice of perception in this mode of speaking? Does it not seem as if all ages were not equally favoured from on high; gifts both moral and intellectual being vouchsafed to one that are all but withheld from another? As with individual men, so with nations and with humanity at large, may not the hour of highest spiritual elevation and sternest moral resolve be nearest the hour of most absolute obliviousness and most profound degradation? Has not humanity also its moods—now brutal and full-acorned, large in physical device, and pregnant with the wit of unconcern; again, touched to higher things, tearful for very goodness, turning an upward eye to the stars, and shivering to its smallest nerve with the power and the sense of beauty? In rude and superficial expression of which fact, have not our literary men coined the common-place that a critical and sceptical age always follows an age of heroism and creative genius? These, we say, are queries which, though they may not be answered to their depths, it is still useful to put and ponder. One remark only will we venture in connexion with them. According to one theory, it is a sufficient explanation of these moral and intellectual changes in the spirit of nations, to suppose that they take place by a law of mere contagion or propagation from individual to individual. One man of powerful and original nature, or of unusually accurate perceptions, makes his appearance in some central, or, it may be, sequestered spot; he gains admirers or makes converts; disciples gather round him, or try to form an opinion of him from a distance; they,



again, in their turn, affect others, till, at last, as the gloom of the largest church is slowly changed into brilliance by the successive lighting of all its lamps, so a whole country may, district by district, succumb to the peculiarity of a new influence! Now, this is perfectly true; and it would be indeed difficult to estimate the amazing efficacy of such a law of incessant diffusion from point to point over a surface. But we are convinced that this mode of representing the fact under notice does not convey the whole truth. Concerning even the silent pestilences, we have been recently taught that they do not wholly depend on transmission from individual to individual, but are rather distinct derangements in the body of the earth itself, tremors among its electricities and imponderables, alterations of the sum-total of those material conditions wherewith human life has been associated. In like manner, as it appears to us, must those streaming processes of sympathy and contagion, whereby a moral or intellectual change is diffused over a community, be regarded as but the superficial indications of a deep contemporaneous agitation pervading the whole frame of Nature. From the mineral core of this vast world, outwards to the last thoughts, impulses, and conclusions of us its human inhabitants, there runs, as science teaches, a mystic law of intercourse and affinity, pledging its parts to act in concert. The moral and intellectual revolutions of our world, its wars, its new philosophies, its outbursts of creative genius, its profligate sinkings, and its noble recoveries, all must rest, under the decree of supreme wisdom, on a concurrent basis of physical undulations and vicissitudes. When, therefore, a man starts up in any locality, charged with a new spirit or a new desire, there, be sure, the ground around him is similarly affected. New intellectual dispositions are like atmospheres; they overhang whole countries at once. It is not necessarily by communication or plagiarism that the thought excogitated to-day in London breaks out to-morrow in Edinburgh, or that persons in Göttingen and Oxford are found speculating at the same time in the same direction. In our own island, for example, it is a fact capable of experimental verification, that whatever is being thought at any one

time in any one spot, is, with a very small amount of difference, being independently thought at the same time in fifty other places at all distances from each other. And yet it is equally true that in every moral or spiritual revolution there is always a leader, a forerunner, a man of originality, in whose individual bosom the movement seems to have been rehearsed and epitomized; and that, in the beginning of every such revolution, the power of contagion from man to man, and the machinery of the clique, school, or phalanx, must come into play.

We do not think that these remarks are too remote or abstract for the present occasion. The nineteenth century, it appears to us, is a sufficiently large portion of historic time, England is a sufficiently large portion of the historic earth, and the poetical literature of England, or of any other nation, is a sufficiently important element in that nation's existence, to justify our viewing that remarkable phenomenon, *the revival of English poetry in the nineteenth century*, in the light of the most extreme general conceptions that can be brought to bear upon it. Against the preceding observations, therefore, as against what seems an appropriate background, let us try to bring out the main features of the phenomenon itself, so far, at least, as these can be exhibited with reference to the life and writings of its most "representative man." And first, of Wordsworth regarded historically.

From Dryden till about fifty years ago, say our authorities in literary history, was an era of poetical sterility in England. When Coleridge gave lectures in London on the English poets, he divided them into three lists or sections—the first, including all the poets from Chaucer to Dryden; the second, **all** those from Dryden inclusive to the close of the eighteenth century; and the third, all those of his own generation. The view presented by him of the characters of these three periods, relatively to each other, was essentially that conveyed in the strange theory of alternate ebb and flow, alternate immission and withdrawal of power, as regulating the progress of the universe. In other words, the first period was a period of strength, youth, and outburst; the second was a period of

cleverness, conceit, and poverty ; and the third was a period of revival. For, the poetic spirit being one constant thing, a certain specific and invariable quality or state of the human soul, not capable of change from century to century, but the same of old, now, and for ever, it follows that the history of poetry can present no other appearance than that of alternate presence and absence, alternate excess and deficiency, alternate extinction and renovation. That is to say—accepting the poetry of Chaucer and Milton as true poetry, we cannot go on to defend the poetry of Pope and Johnson as true poetry of a different kind, and then, coming down to our own age, assert that its poetry is true poetry of a different kind still. Except in a very obvious sense, rendered necessary by convenience, it cannot be said that there are *kinds* of poetry. The materials on which the poetic sense works are constantly varying ; infinite, also, are the combinations of human faculty and will with which this sense may be structurally associated ; but the sense itself, whensoever and in whomsoever it may be found, is still the same old thing that trembled in the heart of Homer. An age may have it or want it ; may have more of it or less of it ; may have it in conjunction with this or with that aggregate of other characteristics ; but cannot abandon one form of it and take up another.

In these remarks we have embodied what we consider a very necessary caution. If much good has been done by that exaltation of meaning which the words Poet and Poetry have received from the hands of Coleridge and others, as well as by their kindred services in distinguishing so constantly and so emphatically between the terms reason and understanding, genius and talent, creation and criticism, we are not quite sure but that, at the same time, this infusion of new conceptions into our language has been productive of some mischief. Agreeing, upon the whole, with the sentence of condemnation which has been of late passed upon part of the poor eighteenth century ; believing that it was a critical, negative, and unpoetic age ; nay, even believing (however the belief is to be reconciled with the doctrine of continuous historic evolution) that it was one of those seasons of comparative diminution of the

general vital energy of our species which we have already spoken of, we still think that too sweeping a use has been made of this notion and its accessories by a certain class of writers. Let us illustrate our meaning by an example. Keats, the poet, and James Mill, the historian of India, were contemporaries. The one, according to the language introduced by Coleridge, was a man of genius; the other was a man of talent. In the soul of Keats, if ever in a human soul at all, there was a portion of the real poetic essence—the real faculty divine; Mr. Mill, on the other hand, had probably as little of the poet in his composition as any celebrated man of his time, but he was a man of hard metal, of real intellectual strength, and of unyielding rectitude. In certain exercises of the mind he could probably have crushed Keats, who certainly was no weakling, as easily as a giant could crush a babe. But, suppose the two men to have sat together on Hampstead Heath in a starry night, which of them would then have been the stronger—which would have known the more ecstatic pulses? Or, to make the case still more decisive, suppose the two men to have been Keats and Aristotle; Keats, a consumptive poetic boy, and Aristotle the intellect of half a world. Does not such a contrast bring out the real injustice that has been done to many truly great and good men by the habit which, since the time of Coleridge, has become general, of placing all the men that belong to the so-called category of genius in one united mass above all that only rank in the category of talent? For, granting, as we certainly do, the reality of some such distinction as is implied between the two substantives, is it not clear that the general mass of mind possessed by a man reputed to belong to the inferior category, and consequently, also, his general power to influence the soul of the world, may exceed a thousand times that possessed by a man of the other? In other words, may not a man rank so high in the one kind, that, even allowing the kind itself to be inferior, it may be said with truth that he is a hundred times greater a man than some specified lower man in the other? Practically, the tenor of these remarks is, that we are in the present day committing an injustice by following the tendency of our young

Coleridgians to restrict the meaning of the quantitative word "greatness" within the limits of the merely qualitative word "genius." And, speculatively, their tenor may be expressed in the proposition that this quality or mode of mind called genius, the poetic sense, creative power, and so on, may exist in association with all possible varieties of intellectual or cerebral vigour, from the mediocrity of a Kirke White or an Anacreon, up to the stupendousness of a Shakespeare. It is thus that, while agreeing in the main with the opinion that from Dryden to the close of the next hundred years was a poetic interregnum, we would still make our peace with those who would fight the battle of the much-abused eighteenth century; and that we would steer clear of the controversy whether Pope was a poet. As deficiency in poetic power does not imply corresponding deficiency in what may be called ordinary cerebral vigour, so the eighteenth century, though admitted to have been unpoetic, may have been a very respectable century notwithstanding; and even were we to exclude Pope from the class of poets (which most certainly we would not do), we might still hold him to have been a phenomenon in literature, not, on that account, a whit the less remarkable. A deeper analysis would carry us farther into the question as to the connexion between poetic power and general intellect in individuals and in ages; but here we must stop.

Having thus explained in what sense we understand that general assertion regarding the low state of English poetry in the eighteenth century, (part of the seventeenth included,) with which the name of Wordsworth is irrevocably associated, let us attend a little to the facts of the case. In what did the sterility of English poetry in that age consist, and what words would best describe it? Here Wordsworth himself comes to our aid. The following is from an Appendix to the Preface to the second edition of his *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1800: the subject under discussion is Poetic Diction.

"The earliest poets of all nations generally wrote from passion excited by real events, they wrote naturally and as men, feeling powerfully as they did, their language was daring and figurative. In succeeding time, poets, and men ambitious of the fame of poets, perceiving the influence of such language, and desirous of producing the same effect without being animated with the same passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of these figures of speech, and



made use of them, sometimes with propriety, but much more frequently applied them to feelings and thoughts with which they had no natural connexion whatsoever. A language was thus insensibly produced, differing materially from the real language of men in *any situation*. The reader or hearer of this distorted language found himself in a perturbed and unusual state of mind : when affected by the genuine language of passion he had been in a perturbed and unusual state of mind also : in both cases he was willing that his common judgment and understanding should be laid asleep, and he had no instinctive and infallible perception of the true to make him reject the false ; the one served as a passport for the other. The emotion was in both cases delightful ; and no wonder if he confounded the one with the other, and believed them both to be produced by the same or similar causes. Besides, the poet spake to him in the character of a man to be looked up to, a man of genius and authority. Thus, and from a variety of other causes, this distorted language was received with admiration ; and poets, it is probable, who had before contented themselves for the most part with misapplying only expressions which at first had been dictated by real passion, carried the abuse still further, and introduced phrases composed apparently in the spirit of the original figurative language of passion, yet altogether of their own invention, and characterised by various degrees of wanton deviation from good sense and nature. . . . Perhaps in no way, by positive example, could be more easily given a notion of what I mean by the phrase *poetic diction* than by referring to a comparison between the metrical paraphrases which we have of passages in the Old and New Testament, and those passages as they exist in our common translation. By way of immediate example, take the following of Dr. Johnson :—

‘ Turn on the prudent ant thy heedless eyes,  
Observe her labours, sluggard, and be wise ;  
No stern command, no monitory voice,  
Prescribes her duties, or directs her choice ;  
Yet, timely provident, she hastes away  
To snatch the blessings of a plenteous day ;  
When fruitful summer loads the teeming plain,  
She crops the harvest, and she stores the grain.  
How long shall sloth usurp thy useless hours,  
Unnerve thy vigour, and enchain thy powers ?  
While artful shades thy downy couch enclose,  
And soft solicitation courts repose,  
Amidst the drowsy charms of dull delight,  
Year chases year with unremitted flight,  
Till want now following, fraudulent and slow,  
Shall spring to seize thee, like an ambush’d foe.’

From this hubbub of words pass to the original. ‘ Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise : which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard ? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep ? Yet a little sleep, yet a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep ! So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.’ ”

To sum up the views thus presented by Wordsworth of the state of English poetry after Milton, it may be said that at that time the nation, having lost much of the genuine poetical power it had formerly possessed, but still preserving a form of composition to which it had been so long and so powerfully accustomed, began to regard the essence of poetry as lying in metre, accompanied by a certain peculiar and artificial



phrasology called poetic diction; thus begetting that exaggerated antithesis between poetry and prose with which our language is still infected. Instead of regarding the poetic faculty as consisting in a mode or attitude of the mind, distinguishable, on the one hand, from the scientific mode or attitude whose function is investigation or exposition, and, on the other hand, from the oratorical mode or attitude whose function is to excite or stimulate in a particular direction—they made poetry to consist in a mode of language, and they estimated the value of a poet according to the degree of mastery he had attained in the use of this mode of language, and the degree of general mental power and resource he could manifest through it. Hence, in the first place, a gradual increase of departure in metrical composition from the idioms and combinations of words deemed appropriate to prose; and, in the second place, a gradual reduction of the range of metre itself to certain fixed varieties and methods of versification, which the older poets, who did not so much assort their thoughts to rhymes as let the thoughts flow out in their own rhythm, would have disdained as much as a natural cascade would disdain the assistance of pipes. But while an exaggerated antithesis was thus established between prose and poetry, it by no means followed that a very wide separation was drawn between the devotees of the one and those of the other. Poetry was indeed a different form of diction from prose; but then, as it was not difficult for a clever man to acquire two forms of diction, one might very well be both a poet and a prose-writer! To pass from prose to poetry was but to pass, as it were, from one's town to one's country house. Hence it was that so many of the literary men of last century had a reputation both in prose and in verse. General mental vigour carried an author triumphantly through either form of composition. Wit, sarcasm, strength, manliness, whatever qualities of intellect or disposition could earn respect for a writer in prose, were all capable—with a little training, or a slight native impulse towards the picturesque, to aid him—of being transfused into metre. The best poetry of the age was, accordingly, rather wit or reflection expressed

in metre, than real poetry in the strict sense of the word. And here lies the defence of the poets of that time, as well as their condemnation. Of many of them it may be denied that they were poets; but of almost all of them it may be asserted that they were men of general mental vigour. In our disquisitions concerning them, therefore, let not this be forgotten. If Johnson was no poet, he was a very ponderous and noble old fellow nevertheless; and even the purists that would clip the laurels of Dryden and Pope, must admit that we have no such manly *literati* as the former now-a-days about Leicester Square, and that the other was a diamond of the first water.

But the change came at length. By the mysterious operation of those laws which determine the risings and the sinkings of the mental state of humanity as a whole, there seemed to be effected, towards the close of the eighteenth century, a sudden increase of the vital energy of the species. Humanity assumed a higher mood; a deep agitation, as if from a fresh electric discharge out of celestial space into the solid body of our planet, shook the soul of the world, and left it troubled and excited. The two most conspicuous and extensive manifestations of this heightened state of the world's consciousness were—in the region of speculation, the promulgation of the transcendental philosophy in Germany, and, in the region of action, the French Revolution. But, as if the same spirit which burst forth in these two great eruptions also sought vent through smaller and apparently unconnected orifices all over Europe, there were not wanting other significant indications of the change that was transacting itself. In Germany, seemingly apart from the transcendental philosophy, though in reality deriving strength from it through a subterranean conduit, a new literature came forth under the care, first of Lessing, and then of Goethe. And in our own country, sprinkled over as it had been in spots by the sound and fertile philosophy of Reid, there was a feebler exhibition of the same phenomenon. Even in the age of reputed degeneracy there had been men of the true poetic spark. Dryden and Pope may not have kept it pure, but they assuredly had it; Gray, notwithstanding the dreadful disin-

tegration to which his Elegy has been submitted by modern critics, did certainly possess the ear and sensibility of a poet; Collins and Goldsmith were men of musical hearts; and Thomson, Wordsworth himself being judge, was a genuine child of rural nature. Nor here, whatever other names are left unmentioned, let *him* be forgotten, the boy of Bristol, the drunken choir-singer's posthumous son, who was found dead in his garret in Brooke Street, Holborn, on the 25th of August, 1770. But the real poetic outburst came after these men had been removed from the scene, and was plainly a consequence of that general commotion of the whole earth to which we have already alluded. Its earliest unmistakeable signs may be said to have been given in the works of Cowper and Burns. In the bard of Olney, invalid as he was, the new force that was pent up in the heart of nature found an English mind that it could compel to speak for it; and when the swarthy Scottish ploughman filled the Lowlands with his songs, it was clear that the process of reformation had been completed as regarded this island, to its last spontaneous results, and that every acre of the British earth had become instinct and pregnant with the novel fire.

Accordingly, this was the period of the birth and training of new English poets. Crabbe, Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, were children of this period, and in all of them—their peculiar differences allowed for to the utmost—the new spirit was visible. It was assigned to Wordsworth, however, more than to any other man, to be conscious of the fact, that such a new spirit had been breathed into the world at all, and to conclude the process of its diffusion through society, by bringing into play the powers of theoretical exposition through the press, and personal influence over distinguished contemporaries. Born among the Cumberland hills, in the year 1770, that is, in the year of Chatterton's death, Wordsworth was but eleven years younger than Burns. It is pleasant to think that these two men, though they never met, were near neighbours. From within half a mile of Burns's house at Ellisland, the Cumberland mountains may be seen; and since the days of Drayton, the Scottish Scruffel and the

English Skiddaw have mutually recognised each other in popular verse. Wordsworth himself, on visiting the land of Burns, called this fact to mind :—

“ Huge Criffel’s hoary top ascends,  
By Skiddaw seen,—  
Neighbours we were, and loving friends  
We might have been.”

When Burns died, at the age of thirty-seven, Wordsworth was a young man of twenty-six. He had been destined for the Church, and, for that purpose, had graduated at St. John’s, Cambridge; but, caught as he had been from the first by the new spirit of song, then hanging most powerfully, as it would seem, over both shores of the Solway, he had already recognised his proper office, and consecrated his life to the Muses. In 1793, the year of the publication by Burns of the fourth edition of his poems, Wordsworth had given to the world his first productions—two poems in the heroic couplet, entitled, respectively, *An Evening Walk, addressed to a Young Lady*, and *Descriptive Sketches, taken during a pedestrian Tour among the Alps*. These two compositions are slender enough for modern reading; but how powerful was the impression that they produced on some minds by the peculiarity of their style, may be inferred from the following testimony of another youthful poet, who, coming to Cambridge immediately after Wordsworth had left it, naturally took an interest in what his predecessor had done. “During the last year of my residence at Cambridge,” says Coleridge, “I became acquainted with Mr. Wordsworth’s first publication, entitled *Descriptive Sketches*; and seldom, if ever, was the emergence of an original poetic genius above the literary horizon more evidently announced.” It was not till 1796, however, that the two poets became personally known to each other. Like Coleridge, Wordsworth, who had travelled, and resided in France during the fervours of the French Revolution, partook, and in no moderate degree, of the social enthusiasm of the time; and, the two aspirants having gone to live together for a summer, in a pleasant retreat on the coast of Somersetshire, their demeanour, as Coleridge informs



us in his *Biographia Literaria*, attracted so much local attention, that Government was induced to send a spy to watch them. The poor man, however, after dogging them for some weeks in their walks, acquitted them of any disloyal intention, and even became ashamed of his office; feeling sure, as he said, from their continual talking of one *Spy-Nosy*, as they sat together for hours on a sandbank, behind which he lay concealed, that they had detected him, and were making game of him. As Wordsworth's temporary sympathies with the French Revolution may be supposed to have placed him in vital connexion with one of the two great phenomena in which, as we have said, the sudden access of new energy to the human race as a whole at that time declared itself; so, we may also suppose, those sea-side conversations of his about *Spy-Nosy*, with the "noticeable man with large grey eyes," must have placed him in sufficient connexion with the other phenomenon, the Transcendental Philosophy. Moreover, in 1798, the two friends made a tour together in Germany; and whatever speculative insight was obtained by Coleridge during his whole life, was evidently communicated, if not in the form of creed, at least in the form of conception, to the less analytic poet.

In 1798, Wordsworth published his *Lyrical Ballads*; to the second edition of which, printed in 1800, he appended his first prose exposition of those principles on which as a poet he professed to write, and to which Coleridge, by the fact of his association with him in the publication (the *Ancient Mariner* appeared in companionship with the *Lyrical Ballads*), virtually gave in his adhesion. Wordsworth's next publication was in 1807, when he printed in two volumes a variety of poems composed in preceding years. Meanwhile he had married, and retired to his native Lakes, to lead among their quiet beauties the tranquil life he deemed alone suitable to the poetic nature. Southey's subsequent retirement to the same part of the country, and Coleridge's frequent visits to it, gave occasion to the celebrated nickname of the "Lake School," applied to the three poets and their followers. With the exception of a few tours in Scotland and the Con-

continent, and occasional journeys to the metropolis, the whole remainder of Wordsworth's long life was spent among the Lakes. Here, in the enjoyment of worldly competence, he walked, boated, wrote, and attended church; hence from time to time he issued his new poems, or collections of poems, accompanied by prefaces or dissertations, intended to illustrate their peculiar character; and here in the bosom of his admiring family, he received the chance visits of such stray worshippers as came privileged with letters of introduction, talking with them in a cold stately way, and not unfrequently (be the truth distinctly spoken) shocking them by the apparent egotism with which he referred to or quoted his own poetry, the inordinate indifference he displayed towards most things besides, the painful rigour with which he exacted from those around him every outward mark of respect and attention, and the seriousness with which he would repeat the most insignificant words that had been uttered in his praise. These particulars regarding the man are already irrevocably before the public in our books of literary gossip, and may not, therefore, be wholly omitted even in a notice dedicated to the poet. But whatever may have been his bearing in the presence of other men, Wordsworth must have been at least modest and cordial in his communion with Nature. And it is thus that we should remember him; not as the pleasant ornament of the social board, lavishing the kind word and the hearty repartee; not as the self-forgetting enthusiast of the hour, burning his way through crowds, and drawing adoration and love in his train; but, as he was in his old age, the conscious patriarch of English poesy, the grey-haired and hard-featured recluse, shunning the haunts of men, yet with a benevolent hand for the familiar woes of the neighbourhood which knew and honoured him; accustomed to walk alone by day amid the woods; to pace muttering by the ripple of a lake in the moonlight; or, standing half way up a mountain, to turn his pale unearthly eye towards the heaven of stars. Such he was through all the turmoil of a generation into which, almost alone of his coevals, he had lived to advance; and such he was till, in his eighty-first year, death took him.



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 guage. Only one consideration should operate to make him  
 modify that language; the consideration, namely, that his  
 business as a poet is to give pleasure. All such words or  
 expressions, therefore, as, though natural in the original  
 transaction of a passionate scene, would be unpleasant or  
 disgusting in its poetic rehearsal, must be omitted. Pruned  
 and weeded in accordance with this negative rule, any  
 description of a moving occurrence, whether in prose or  
 verse, would be true poetry. But to secure still more per-  
 fectly their great end, of giving pleasure while they excite  
 emotion, poets have devised the artificial assistance of metre  
 or verse. The rationale of the use of metre consists in this,  
 that it provides for the reader or hearer a succession of  
 minute pleasurable surprises apart from and independent of  
 the emotion produced by the matter for which it is the vehicle.  
 A prose version of a passionate story, though, if well managed,  
 it would not be so painful as the original transaction, and  
 might even be pleasurable, would still in many cases be  
 sufficiently painful to prevent its being read more than once.  
 But, by narrating the same in metre, the poet is able, as it

ingly to administer a series of doses of pleasure  
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efficient, by mingling with the current of the meaning,  
temper and sweeten its effects. And rhyme is a still  
gher form of the same device. The necessities, therefore, of  
metre and rhyme do oblige certain departures in poetry from  
the primary language of emotion; but, allowing for those,  
good poetic diction should still approach very near to the  
language of real life.

This view, so useful as an aggression upon the florid diction  
of the poets of the preceding age, certainly errs by exaggera-  
tion. Wordsworth's own poetry will not stand to be tried by  
it; for, as Coleridge has shown, there is hardly a verse, even  
in his most simple productions, that does not deviate from the  
so-called language of real life. And it must inevitably be so.  
For, in the first place, the mere application of the negative  
principle of modification laid down by Wordsworth, would  
amount to an abandonment of the point at issue. Remove  
all that would be poetically unpleasant from the language of  
real passion in humble life—the bad grammar, the incohe-  
rence, the mispronunciations, and so on; and the language  
that would then be left for the poet would be a very rare and  
select language indeed, existing literally nowhere throughout  
the community, but purely supposititious and ideal, the sap and  
flower of all popular expression. So also with the representa-  
tion of passions of a higher order. The only sense in which  
the language of a great part of our best poetry can be said  
to resemble real language, is that it is the kind of language  
that a few of the most cultured persons of the community would  
employ on very rare and impressive occasions. But even the  
choicest spontaneous language of the best minds when most  
nobly moved in real life, must undergo modification before it  
can be used by the poet. And though Wordsworth has  
provided for such modification, by laying down the positive  
principle, that the poet is at all times to remember that it is  
his office to give pleasure, and by pointing out the operation of  
this principle as regards metre and rhyme; yet he does not seem  
to have seen the whole energy of this principle as determining

The nature of the revolution effected by Wordsworth in the state of English poetry will be best understood by attending to the general tenor of certain propositions advanced and illustrated by him in his various Prefaces and Dissertations between 1800 and 1820. On these propositions, as supplementary to his general critical onslaught on the poetry of the previous age, he may be supposed to have rested his claims to be considered not only a poet, but also the father of a new poetical era.

Poetry, according to Wordsworth, "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity;" what the poet chiefly does, or ought to do, is to represent, out of real life, scenes and passions of an affecting or exciting character. Now, men originally placed in such scenes, or animated by such passions, use a nervous and exquisite language expressly adapted for the occasion by Nature herself; and the poet, therefore, in imitating such scenes or passions, will recal them more vividly in proportion as he can succeed in employing the same language. Only one consideration should operate to make him modify that language; the consideration, namely, that his business as a poet is to give pleasure. All such words or expressions, therefore, as, though natural in the original transaction of a passionate scene, would be unpleasant or disgusting in its poetic rehearsal, must be omitted. Pruned and weeded in accordance with this negative rule, any description of a moving occurrence, whether in prose or verse, would be true poetry. But to secure still more perfectly their great end, of giving pleasure while they excite emotion, poets have devised the artificial assistance of metre or verse. The *rationale* of the use of metre consists in this, that it provides for the reader or hearer a succession of minute pleasurable surprises apart from and independent of the emotion produced by the matter for which it is the vehicle. A prose version of a passionate story, though, if well managed, it would not be so painful as the original transaction, and might even be pleasurable, would still in many cases be sufficiently painful to prevent its being read more than once. But, by narrating the same in metre, the poet is able, as it

were, cunningly to administer a series of doses of pleasure artificially prepared, which, though not very perceptible, are still sufficient, by mingling with the current of the meaning, to attemper and sweeten its effects. And rhyme is a still higher form of the same device. The necessities, therefore, of metre and rhyme do oblige certain departures in poetry from the primary language of emotion; but, allowing for those, good poetic diction should still approach very near to the language of real life.

This view, so useful as an aggression upon the florid diction of the poets of the preceding age, certainly errs by exaggeration. Wordsworth's own poetry will not stand to be tried by it; for, as Coleridge has shown, there is hardly a verse, even in his most simple productions, that does not deviate from the so-called language of real life. And it must inevitably be so. For, in the first place, the mere application of the negative principle of modification laid down by Wordsworth, would amount to an abandonment of the point at issue. Remove all that would be poetically unpleasant from the language of real passion in humble life—the bad grammar, the incoherence, the mispronunciations, and so on; and the language that would then be left for the poet would be a very rare and select language indeed, existing literally nowhere throughout the community, but purely supposititious and ideal, the sap and flower of all popular expression. So also with the representation of passions of a higher order. The only sense in which the language of a great part of our best poetry can be said to resemble real language, is that it is the kind of language that a few of the most cultured persons of the community would employ on very rare and impressive occasions. But even the choicest spontaneous language of the best minds when most nobly moved in real life, must undergo modification before it can be used by the poet. And though Wordsworth has provided for such modification, by laying down the positive principle, that the poet is at all times to remember that it is his office to give pleasure, and by pointing out the operation of this principle as regards metre and rhyme; yet he does not seem to have seen the whole energy of this principle as determining

and compelling departures from common usage. His argument for the virtual identity of poetic language and the language of real life, reminds us of the mania for what is called a simple conversational style. Why do not men write as they speak? Why do they not convey their meaning in books in the good racy English which they employ at the dinner-table, or when giving their household orders? Such are the absurd questions that are asked every day. It never seems to enter into the minds of these people that conversation is one thing, public speaking another, and writing a third; that each involves and requires a distinct setting, so to speak, of the faculties for its exercise; that in passing from one to either of the others, certain powers must be called into play that were before at rest, or sent to rest that were before in play; and that, accordingly, to demand the perpetual use of a conversational style, is to insist that there shall never be anything greater in the world than what conversation can generate. But a world thus restricted to the merely conversational method of literary production would fall into decrepitude. When a man talks with his friend, he is led on but by a few trains of association, and finds a straggling style natural for his purposes; when he speaks in public, the wheels of thought glow, the associative processes by which he advances become more complex, and hence the roll, the cadence, the precipitous burst; and, lastly, when he writes, still other conditions of thought come into action, and there arises the elaborate sentence, winding like a rivulet through the meadow of his subject, or the page jewelled with a thousand allusions. Precisely so in the matter more immediately under discussion. Here, too, there is a gradation. A man in a state of excitement talks in vivid language, and even sets his words to a rough natural music, his voice swelling or trembling with its burthen, though still falling short of song. But in the literary repetition of a scene, nature suggests a new set of proprieties, answering to the entire difference between the mind in the primary and the mind in the secondary attitude; and a literal report would be found to defeat the very end in view, and to be as much out of place as a literal copy in painting. Even



in prose narration there must be a more select and coherent language than served in the primary act of passion, as well as a more melodious music. And when, moved to a still higher flight, the story lifts itself into metre—availing itself, as it were, of a device sanctioned by an origin in some of the more splendid moments of the ancient human soul—then, in exchange for certain advantages, it submits to restrictions that come along with them. Finally, if the charm of rhyme be desired, this too must be purchased by farther and inevitable concessions. Thus, we repeat, there is a gradation. In prose narration language is conditioned by a more complex set of necessities than in actual experience; in metrical narration the conditions are more complex still, so that, if the speech were of marble before, there must now be speech of jasper; and, lastly, in rhyme the conditions compel the thought through so fine a passage that the words it chooses must be opals and rubies. Nor in all this is there any departure from nature. On the contrary, it is a noble provision that, where the ordinary resources even of musical prose are apt to fail, the mind should have more intense methods of production in reserve. Such methods are metre and rhyme. They do not impair the work of intellectual invention, but rather assist it, and render it capable of a more exquisite class of performances than would otherwise be possible. In prose, however musical, the meaning flows, as it were, easily over a level, obeying the guidance of its own associations; in metre, new associations are added, which, while they increase the difficulty, also stimulate the intellect to higher and more transcendental reaches; and when with this is conjoined rhyme, or the obligation of conducting the already moving thought in the direction or towards the horizon of a certain possible number of preconceived sounds, then every fibre of the mind is alert and electric, the whole strength of the household is called into action, and things are done that would surprise the gods.

Although there seems to be no doubt that the vehement opposition that greeted Wordsworth on his appearance as a poet, was determined partly by a perception on the part of the



public of those weaknesses in his theory to which we have been alluding, it seems plain also that much of it was a mere display of that instinct of indignation which seizes men when they see their household gods attacked.

“ ‘ Pedlars,’ and ‘ boats,’ and ‘ waggons !’ Oh ! ye shades  
Of Pope and Dryden, are we come to this ? ”

Such was the universal feeling of the critics. The controversy between the *Edinburgh Review* and Wordsworth, was literally a contest between the old and the new ; in which, however, the old derived certain advantages from the obstinacy and want of tact with which the new exposed and made a boast of its most galling peculiarities. For, if Jeffrey’s criticisms on Wordsworth’s poetry be now compared with the criticisms of Wordsworth’s own friend Coleridge, as published in the *Biographia Literaria*, it will be found that, immeasurably as the two critics differ in spirit—the one refusing to admit Wordsworth to be a good poet at all, the other considering him to be the greatest English poet since Milton—there is still an almost perfect coincidence in their special objections to his style. What Jeffrey attacked was chiefly the alleged childishness of much of Wordsworth’s language, the babyism of his “ Alice Fells,” with their cloaks of “ duffle grey,” &c. ; and it is precisely on these points that Coleridge, even while aware of his friend’s more profound reason for such familiarities, expresses his dissent from him. The truth is, had Wordsworth been a man of more innate energy, more tremendousness, so to speak, as a poet, he would have effected the revolution that was necessary with less delay and opposition. Wrapping up his doctrinal peculiarities, if he had had any, in the midst of his poetry, instead of protruding them in a preface, he would have blasted the old spirit out by the mere infatuation of the new, and wound resistless hands in the hair of the nation’s instincts. But instead of being the Mirabeau of our literary revolution, and hardly aware of his own propositions, he was, as it were, its Robespierre, who first threw his propositions tied in a bunch into the crowd before him, and then fought his way pertinaciously to where

fell. But even thus (and there were doubtless advantages in this method too) he at length obtained success. The "This will never do," with which Jeffrey introduced his criticism of the *Excursion*, proved a false augury. Slowly and reluctantly the nation came round to Wordsworth; and, if there are still many that believe in his defects and shortcomings, all admit him to have been a true poet, and a man of rare genius. Of the poets that have appeared in England since he began his course—the Byrons, the Shelleys, the Keatses, the Tennysons—there is not one that does not owe something to his example and influence. Not that these men would not have been poets, even had Wordsworth never lived. Through them, too, the new spirit with which the world had been charged would infallibly in any case have asserted itself; and, as it is, there has been in each and all of them, something individual and original, which has caught portions of the new spirit that even the soul of Wordsworth could not, and been made capable thereby of perfectly specific things. A Nestor may be the patriarch of the camp, but even his deeds may be, in the end, outdone by the exploits of the younger heroes. Of all the poets that have succeeded Wordsworth, the one that stands most in the position of revolt against him is Byron. The Byronic in poetry is, in some respects, the contradictory of the Wordsworthian. And believing as we do that Byron was also a great poet, and that through him there were poured into our age elements of grandeur and power that were wanting in Wordsworth, and yet needed, we would willingly go on to consider historically the appearance of this other tendency in our literature, known as the Byronic, and to show how the two tributaries became at length united. It is time, however, to leave the historical part of our subject, and direct our attention more expressly to the qualities of Wordsworth as a poet.

That Wordsworth was a true poet, that he did possess the "inherent glow," the "vision and faculty divine," no one that has ever read a page of his writings can honestly deny. Coleridge, in whose vocabulary the word "imagination" stood for the poetic faculty *par excellence*, pronounced Words-

worth to be, in imaginative power, "the nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton." This estimate may be opposed by some as too high; but keeping in view the precise sense attached by Coleridge to his words, it will be difficult to lower it very much. Nor, in accepting regarding Wordsworth a sentence of the same or of similar import, is it necessary to have any profound theory as to the nature of this so called imaginative or poetic faculty which we then assert him to possess. It is sufficient if we know it when we see it, or if we feel the force of any of those numerous synonyms and circumlocutions by which poets and analysts (Wordsworth himself amongst others) have sought to describe it. For, after all, we define such terms best when we rave about them, adhering to no one form of expression, but supplementing, as it were, the defects of all possible conception by the vagueness and the force of sound. Perhaps the phrase which, if fully apprehended, would best convey the notion of what is meant by imagination as the faculty of the poet, would be the phrase "Creative Energy." For this phrase would carry with it one very essential discrimination—the discrimination, namely, of the poetic faculty, as such, both from that passive sensibility by which the mind, presenting, as it were, a photographic surface to the universe, receives from it impressions of whatever is; and also from that minor and more ordinary exercise of activity by which the mind, sitting thereafter amid these received impressions, recollects, registers, and compares them. What the imaginative or poetic faculty does is something beyond this; and is more akin (with reverence be it spoken) to the operation of that original cosmic power at whose fiat the atoms and the elements sprang first together. A certain accumulation of material, a certain assemblage of impressions, or mental objects, being supplied by the consciousness, and lying there ready, it is the part of this faculty to discharge into them a portion *self* that shall fuse them into a living whole, capable of being contemplated with pleasure. This—the *poiesis* or creation of new unities, the information of mere knowledge with somewhat of the spirit of the knower, the incorporation of diverse impressions and recollections by

the combining flash of a specific mental act—is essentially the function of the imagination. Now, as all men possess this faculty in some degree, and as in the generation of all the higher species of thought or action it must be present in a very large degree, by whatever name such species of thought or action are called, it is only in a certain supreme sense that imagination is set apart in all languages as the proper faculty of poets. Yet there is reason in this. Poets pre-eminently are men that breathe their own spirit into things, that make self dominate over what is distinct from self, that give out into the universe more than they receive from it. So in Goethe's matchless lines on the poet—

“Wherewith bestirs he human spirits?  
Wherewith makes he the elements obey?  
Is't not the stream of song that out his bosom springs,  
And to his heart the world back coiling brings?”

That is, the stream of song, or, in other words, of self, flowing forth from the poet's heart into the world of phenomena, entwines itself there with this and with that portion of matter or experience, and then flows back to whence it came, coiling what it has captured along with it. This power, this overflowing of self upon the universe, so characteristic of the poet, appears most of all in his eye. The eyes of some men are dull and obtuse; those of others are sharp and piercing, as if they shot their power out in lines; the eyes of the poet are heavy-laden and melancholy, like pools continually too full.

However we choose to vary the words that are taken to define the essential faculty of the poet, we shall find that they apply to Wordsworth. Every page of his poetry abounds with instances of imagination. Thus, from the *Excursion*—

“Some tall crag  
That is the eagle's birth-place, or *some peak*  
*Familiar with forgotten years*, that shows  
Inscribed upon its visionary sides  
The history of many a winter-storm,  
Or obscure record of the path of fire.”

Or from *Peter Bell*—

“And he had trudged through Yorkshire dales,  
Among the rocks and winding scars;  
Where deep and low *the hamlets lie*  
*Beneath their little patch of sky,*  
*And little lot of stars.*”

Or from the fine ode on *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Childhood*—

“Our life is but a sleep and a forgetting :  
 The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
 And cometh from afar :  
 Not in entire forgetfulness,  
 And not in utter nakedness,  
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
 From God who is our home :  
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy !  
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
 Upon the growing boy ;  
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows—  
 He sees it in his joy ;  
 The youth who daily further from the east  
 Must travel, still is Nature's priest,  
 And by the vision splendid  
 Is on his way attended ;  
 At length the Man perceives it die away,  
 And fade into the light of common day.”

These, and hundreds of other passages that might be quoted, show that Wordsworth possessed, in a very high degree indeed, the true primary quality of the poet—imagination; a surcharge of personality or vital spirit, perpetually overflowing among the objects of the otherwise conditioned universe, and refashioning them according to its pleasure.

If we proceed now to inquire what were the most prominent of those other characteristics which, acting and re-acting with this generic tendency in the economy of Wordsworth's mind, determined the specific peculiarities of his poetical productions, we are sure to be impressed first of all with his extreme sensibility to, and accurate acquaintance with, the changing phenomena of external nature. It is a just complaint against civilisation, as that word is at present defined, and especially against life in cities, that men are thereby shut out, or rather shut in, from sources of sensation the most pure and healthy of any. That people should know something of the aspects of the earth they live on; that they should be familiar with the features of at least a portion of its undisguised surface, with its rocks, its woods, its turf, its hills, as seen in the varying lights of day and night, and the varying livery of the seasons: this, it may be said, was



clearly intended to be for ever a part of the mere privilege of existence. But a large proportion of mankind have been obliged to let slip even this poor item of their right in being. Pent up, on the one hand, in their cares against starvation, and, on the other, in their devices for artificial comfort, men have ceased to regard, with the same true intimacy as of old, the venerable face of their ancient mother. Certain great admonitions of the outward, indeed, will always remain with men wheresoever they pass their days—the overarching sky, the midnight winds, the sea's expanse, the yellow cornfield, the wooded landscape. And, after all, these are the images of nature that have most power to stir and affect us; these, of which not even cities can deprive us. Cities, too, have their own peculiar kinds of scenery, of which, and especially of their nocturnal aspects, enough has not yet been made. Thus, in Keats's *Lamia*—

“As men talk in a dream, so Corinth all,  
Throughout her palaces imperial,  
And all her populous streets and temples lewd,  
Mutter'd, like tempest in the distance brew'd,  
To the wide-spread night above her towers.”

But of the rural *minutiæ* of Nature, and also of what may be called her aspects of the horrible and lonesome, most of us, above all if we are denizens of cities, are compelled to be ignorant. Very few, for example, can tell the names of the various forest trees, or distinguish them from each other; and fewer still can recognise, either by name or association, the various wild-flowers that grow in the meadows. How much also of sympathy with nature have we not lost, by not knowing, with the shepherd or husbandman, the signs of the weather; what the clouds say when they hurry so, what mean those motions of the cattle, and why the mists roll down the hills? And then, in the more special region of phenomena to which we have alluded, who among us experience, save by rare chance, the realities of those scenes so telling in books of fiction—the dark and solitary moor with the light glimmering in the distance, the fearful bivouac in the depths of a wood, or the incessant breaking of the waves at midnight against the cliff-embattled shore? In



that single ride from Ayr to Allowa' Kirk (we agree with a writer in an old magazine), the immortal Tam saw more, even omitting the witches, than most of us see in a lifetime.

Now, it is a curious fact, that one of the most characteristic features of that revolution in English poetry with which the name of Wordsworth is associated, has been the increased interest that it has both instinctively aroused and knowingly cultivated in the facts and appearances of material nature. If, as Wordsworth himself has said, hardly a new original image or description of nature was introduced into English verse in the age between Milton and Thomson, our recent poets have certainly retrieved the neglect. "Nature, nature," has been their cry; and as Bacon, after his own lordly fashion of thought, fancied that it was of service to his health and spirits to inhale every morning the smell of freshly-ploughed earth into which he had poured wine, so they have interpreted literally their prescriptions to the same effect, by renewing as often as possible their acquaintance with the rural earth, and falling periodically on the turf, as it were, with their faces downwards. In particular, it must have been remarked what an increased familiarity our recent poets have contracted with the vegetable department of nature. Chaucer himself could hardly have described the beauties of a field or a garden more minutely than some of our modern versifiers. Nor among the poets that have helped to cultivate this delight in the observation of natural appearances, is there any one that deserves to be ranked before Wordsworth. A native of scenes celebrated for their loveliness, he seems to have been endowed from the first with a capacity to feel and appreciate their benignant influence. In one of the few fragments that have been given to the world of his unpublished poem, *The Prelude*, he thus describes his sympathy with nature in childhood:—

" In November days,  
When vapours rolling down the valleys, made  
A lonely scene more lonesome; among woods  
At noon, and mid the calm of summer nights,  
When, by the margin of the trembling lake,

Beneath the gloomy hills, homeward I went  
 In solitude, such intercourse was mine :  
 Mine was it in the fields, both day and night,  
 And by the waters, all the summer long.  
 And in the frosty season, when the sun  
 Was set, and, visible for many a mile,  
 The cottage windows through the twilight blazed ;  
 I heeded not the summons : happy time  
 It was indeed for all of us ; for me  
 It was a time of rapture ! Shod with steel  
 We hissed along the polished ice, in games  
 Confederate, imitative of the chase  
 And woodland pleasures—the resounding horn,  
 The pack loud chiming, and the hunted hare.  
 So through the darkness and the cold we flew,  
 And not a voice was idle : with the din  
 Smitten, the precipices rang aloud ;  
 The leafless trees, and every icy crag  
 Tinkled like iron ; while far distant hills  
 Into the tumult sent an alien sound  
 Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars,  
 Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west  
 The orange sky of evening died away.”

This intimacy with the face of the earth, this rich and keen sense of pleasure in English nature, whether in her vernal or her wintry aspects, Wordsworth carried with him into manhood. Submitting it, together with all else that he knew of himself, to his judgment for examination, he seems even to have arrived at a theory, that it is essential for every poet that would peacefully possess his faculty in these modern times, to connect himself permanently and domestically with some appropriate spot or tract of scenery, the whole influence of which he may thoroughly exhaust and incorporate with his verse. At least, in his own case, some such general conviction appears to have blended with the mere sentiment of local attachment, which was doubtless strong in him, in determining his retirement to the Lakes. There are even traces, we fancy, of a disposition on his part to generalize the feeling still more, and to lay it down as a maxim that, in all ordinary cases, the natal spot of every human being is the appropriate spot of his activity through life, removal from which must injure him ; and that, so far as our present social arrangements render this impossible, and our present facilities for locomotion render the reverse easy, so far we fall short of the ideal state of things, as between

us and the globe we inhabit. In the abeyance of this law, (hard law for Scotchmen !) lay, he seems to have felt, one of the great uses of descriptive poetry. While men do tear themselves away from their native localities, and traverse the earth, or congregate in cities, descriptive poetry, he persuaded himself, must ever possess a refreshing and medicinal virtue. It was one of his most valued claims, therefore, that he should be considered a genuine English descriptive poet. And certainly this is a claim that even those who think most humbly of his attainments cannot deny him. There would be a propriety, we think, in remembering Wordsworth as a descriptive poet, along with Chaucer and Thomson, thus distinguishing him both from such poets as Burns and Tennyson, on the one hand, and from such poets as Keats on the other. In such poets as Burns and Tennyson, the element of what may be called *human reference* is always so decided, that though no poets describe nature more beautifully when they have occasion, it would still be improper to speak of them specially as descriptive poets. To borrow a distinction from the sister art, it may be said that, if Burns and Tennyson are more properly classed with the figure-painters, notwithstanding the extreme beauty and finish of their natural backgrounds, so, on the same principle, Wordsworth, whose skill in delineating the human subject is also admitted, may yet not erroneously be classed with the landscape-painters. On the other hand, he differs from poets like Keats in this, that being a native of the country, and accustomed therefore to the appearances of rural nature in all seasons, he does not confound nature with vegetation. In the poetry of Keats, as all must feel, there is an excess of greenth and vegetable imagery ; in reading his descriptions, we seem either to breathe the air of a hothouse, heavy with the moist odours of great-leaved exotics, or to lie full stretched at noon in some shady nook in a wood, rank underneath with the pipy hemlock, and kindred plants of strange overgrowth. In Wordsworth, as we have seen, there is no such unhealthy lusciousness ; he has his spots of thick herbage, and his banks of florid richness too ; but what

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he delights in is the broad, clear expanse, the placid lake, the pure pellucid air, the quiet outline of the mountain.

The second characteristic of Wordsworth's poetry, to which we would call attention, is the general intellectual vigour it displays, the large amount of really excellent thought that is bedded in it—thought that would have been valuable to the world in whatever form it had been put forth, and which might easily, had Wordsworth not been a poet, have been put forth otherwise than in metre. We have already asserted, with sufficient distinctness, that poetry is something essentially different from Thought or Proposition put into verse. A man may have a profound intellect, and may carry in his head a quantity of thought sufficient to set up a university, or to supersede a British Association, and yet be no poet. Or, on the other hand, a man may have something of the poetic spark in him, and be an intellectual weakling. It remains true, nevertheless, that intellect, or thought—clear, large intellect, such as would be available for any purpose whatever; deep, abundant thought, such as we find in the best philosophical writings—is essential towards forming a great poet. This intellect of the poet may either exert itself in such a state of perfect diffusion through the rest of his mind in its creative act, as only to become manifest in the completed grandeur of the result—which is the case, for example, with the poetry of Homer and Milton; or it may retain its right to act also as a separate organ for the secretion of pure matter of thought, which is the case, above all, with the poetry of Shakespeare. In Wordsworth's poetry the presence of a superior intellect—an intellect strong, high, and subtle, if not of extreme dimensions—may be discovered by both of these tests. In the first place, the substance of his poetry, its logical compactness, and its entire freedom from mere rubbish or commonplace, prove that a powerful and scholarly mind must have presided over the work of composition. On the other hand, for proofs that Wordsworth was familiar, even formally, with the best philosophical ideas of his time, one needs only to dip into his *Excursion*, or any other of his

severer poems. Thus, in the following passage, short as it is, the metaphysical reader will discern a perfect mastery, on the part of the poet, over a conception the power of grasping which is recognised in the schools as the one test of a mind capable of metaphysical studies :—

“ My voice proclaims  
How exquisitely the individual Mind  
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less  
Of the whole species) to the External world  
Is fitted :—and how exquisitely too—  
Theme this but little heard of among men—  
The External world is fitted to the Mind ;  
And the Creation (by no lower name  
Can it be called) which they with blended might  
Accomplish—this is our high argument.”

This, and similar conceptions of a very high metaphysics, were evidently as familiar to Wordsworth as they were to Coleridge, from whom, it is very probable, he may have originally derived them. Indeed, making due allowance for the necessary difference between the scientific and the poetic mode of presenting truths, it may be alleged that there is hardly a notion of any generality put forth by Coleridge, whether in psychology, theology, politics, or literary criticism, some recognition of which may not be discovered either in the poems or in the prose dissertations of Wordsworth. The agreement between these two men intellectually seems to have been complete in almost every particular. Both professed political Conservatism ; both conducted their speculative reasonings to a point where they merged in belief in Divine Revelation, and in a system of tenets derived from that belief, not differing essentially from theological orthodoxy ; and both exhibited an ardent attachment to the forms and rules of the Church of England. It may even be questioned by a certain class of critics whether Wordsworth, in his treatment of such matters, has not sometimes taken leave of the poetical mood altogether, and assumed the mood of the preacher ; whether the didactic fit did not sometimes overcome him in his poetry, and whether he has not allowed the controversial spirit, so manifest in his prefaces, to run over also somewhat deleteriously into his metre.

But, as distinct from the general intellectual excellence of

Wordsworth's productions, we have to notice their singularly calm, religious, and contemplative tone. By thoughtfulness or contemplativeness we usually mean something quite distinguishable from mere intellectual vigour or opulence. The French are an intellectual nation; they think rapidly and powerfully, but they do not answer to our notion of a thoughtful or contemplative people. Contemplativeness, according to our usage of the word, does not so much imply the power of attaining or producing thought, as the power of brooding sentimentally over thought already attained. If we first oppose the speculative to the active, and then make a farther distinction between the speculative and the contemplative, the character of Hamlet in Shakespeare may be taken to represent the union of the speculative and the contemplative. The Prince is a student from the university, daring into all questions, and fertile at every moment in new generalities and pregnant forms of expression; but his peculiarity consists in this, that far back in his mind there lie certain permanent thoughts and conceptions towards which he always reverts when left alone, and from which he has ever to be roused afresh when anything is to be done. Now it is this tendency to relapse into a few favourite, and, as it were, constitutional trains of thought, that makes the contemplative character. Nor is it difficult to see in what thought it is, above all others, that the contemplative mind will always find its most appropriate food. Birth, death, the future; the sufferings and misdeeds of man in this life, and his hopes of a life to come; the littleness of us and our whole sphere of knowledge, and the awful relations in which we stand to the world of the supernatural—these, if any, are the permanent and inevitable objects of human contemplation and solicitude. From age to age these thoughts have been handed down; every age must entertain, and no age can conclude them. What the ancient Chaldean meditated as he lay at night under the stars of the desert, the same things does the modern student meditate as he paces his lonely room. "Man, that is born of woman, is of a few days and full of trouble;" "How can a man be justified with God?"



“O that one might plead for a man with God as a man pleadeth for his neighbour!”—amid all the changes of manners, dynasties, and races, these thoughts survive. They, and such like, are the peculiarly human thoughts, the thoughts of humanity as such; the thoughts upon which mankind must always fall back, and compared with which all other thoughts are but intrusions and impertinences. Now, although it would be possible, we think, to show that the effect even of abstract speculation if carried far enough is to lead men back into these thoughts and keep them there, so that in this sense the most speculative men must, as if by compulsion, become profoundly contemplative; yet, generally speaking, a distinction may be drawn between men who are speculative, and men who are contemplative in their tendencies. Some men are always active intellectually; always engaged in some process of inquiry and ingenuity—inventing a machine, scheming a project, discovering a law of mind or matter. These men are, in the present sense, speculative men; they are continually at work *within* the ascertained sphere of human activity; and it is by the labours of such men that the mass of this world’s experience of its own self-contained capabilities has been accumulated. But there are other men who, either without being mentally active in this way, or besides being thus active, have a constitutional tendency at all times to fall into a musing attitude; to relapse, as we have already expressed it, into certain ancient and footworn trains of thought that lead apparently nowhither. These are the contemplative men; the men whose favourite position is rather at the circumference of the known sphere than within it; the men who, at whatever time they may be born, receive, cherish, and transmit the permanent and characteristic thoughts of the human race. This quality of contemplativeness is always associated in our minds with the idea of sadness, tearfulness, melancholy. The patriarch Isaac, of whom we are told that he went out into the fields to meditate at eventide, seems, in our fancy, the most mild and pensive of the characters of Scripture. And such men are the salt of the earth. There

is little originality, indeed, in such thoughts as, we have said, form the appropriate food of the contemplative mind. To realize the conception, "All flesh is grass," for example, or the conception, "Why do the wicked prosper?" seems but a very small effort indeed of the intellect, by no means comparable to the effort required in almost every act of daily life. Nevertheless, it remains true that it is only out of a deep soil of such old and simple conceptions, that any kind of true human greatness can rear itself; and also that there are very few minds indeed, in these days of ours, over which these and similar conceptions have their due degree of power. It is accordingly one of the chief merits of Wordsworth that in him this reference to the supernatural, this disposition to interpret all that is visible in the spirit of a conviction of its evanescence, did exist in a very high and unusual measure. He was essentially a pensive or contemplative man; a man that was perpetually recurring to those few extreme thoughts and conceptions which most men never care to reach, and beyond which no man can go. This, which was conspicuous in the very aspect of his countenance, and which his recluse life illustrated, he has himself explicitly asserted.

"On man, on nature, and on human life,  
 Musing in solitude, I oft perceive  
 Fair trains of imagery before me rise,  
 Accompanied by feelings of delight  
 Pure, or with no unpleasing sadness mixed;  
 And I am conscious of affecting thoughts  
 And dear remembrances, whose presence soothes  
 Or elevates the mind, content to weigh  
 The good and evil of our mortal state.  
 —To these emotions, whencesoe'er they come,  
 Whether from breath of outward circumstance,  
 Or from the soul—an impulse to herself—  
 I would give utterance in numerous verse."

It is the blending in Wordsworth of this contemplative tendency with so much general vigour of intellect, that has earned for him the name of the English Philosophical Poet. It ought to be observed also, at the same time, that in all Wordsworth's contemplative poetry the influence of Christian doctrine is plainly discernible. His meditations on Man, Nature, and the Future, are not those of a Pagan sage,

however his language may sometimes consist even with a lofty Pagan view of the universe; on the contrary, he seems to think throughout as one in whose manner of transacting for himself those great and paramount conceptions that form the necessary matter of all real contemplation, that sweet and consoling modification had been wrought which Christianity has rendered possible.

One of the results of Wordsworth's naturally pensive disposition, left to expatiate as it chiefly was among the objects of a retired and pastoral neighbourhood, was, that it gave him a specially keen and sympathetic eye for the characteristic miseries of rural life. We do not think that he was the man that could

“hang  
Brooding above the fierce confederate storm  
Of sorrow, barricadoed evermore  
Within the walls of cities.”

But no man, better than he, could

“Hear Humanity in fields and groves  
Pipe solitary anguish.”

In pathetic stories of humble rural life we know no poet superior to Wordsworth. All the ordinary and, if we may so speak, parochial woes of rural existence in England, seem to have been diligently noted and pondered by him. It is told of Burns by Dugald Stewart, that as they were walking together one morning in the direction of the Braid Hills, near Edinburgh, where they commanded a prospect of the adjacent country, the poet remarked that the sight of so many smoking cottages gave a pleasure to his mind which he did not believe any one could understand that did not know, as he did, how much of real worth and happiness such poor habitations might contain. Now, if the glance with which Wordsworth, in his poetry, looks abroad on the cottage-sprinkled scenery of his native district cannot be said to show that warm familiarity with the daily tenor of humble rustic life which Burns had from experience, it may at least be compared to the kindly glance of some pious and diligent pastor, such as Wordsworth has himself described in his *Excursion*, surveying from a height the scattered homes of his well-known parishioners.

At home in the parsonage there are books, pictures, and probably a piano, the care of a gentle wife or daughters ; in walking over the fields, too, the pastor, an academic and cultured man, has necessarily thoughts and enjoyments of his own ; nevertheless, what he has seen and known of the habits of those among whom he labours has given him an eye to perceive, and a heart to appreciate, their lowliest anxieties and sorrows. Almost exactly so it is with Wordsworth. The incidents of rural life that he delights to depict are precisely those that would arouse the interest and occupy the attention of some good clergyman, active in his duties, and accustomed to store up in his memory the instructive annals of his parish. The death of a poor seduced girl, the return of a disabled soldier to his native village, the wreck of the fortunes of a once thriving family, the solitude of aged widowhood, the nightly moanings of a red-cloaked maniac haunting some dreary spot in the woods — nothing can exceed the pathos with which Wordsworth can tell such simple local stories as these. One can hardly read without tears some of his narratives of this description ; as, for example, that of the poem entitled *Guilt and Sorrow*, that of the pastoral poem entitled *Michael*, or that of the widow Margaret and her lonely cottage, as told in the first book of the *Excursion*. Showing a similar eye for the moral picturesque in humble rural life, though altogether of a more cheerful character, is the fine and hearty tale of the *Waggoner*, perhaps one of the most perfect of all Wordsworth's compositions. And here we may remark, that if Wordsworth had any such theory as we have supposed as to the advantage, in the poetical occupation, of a permanent connexion on the part of the poet with some one spot or district, then, in such a theory, he must necessarily have had respect, as well to the power of familiar modes of life to form the heart of the poet, as to the influence of familiar scenery in attuning his imagination. And certainly there is much in this. Rarely does one that has removed from his native spot form elsewhere relations that can stand him in stead when he wishes to glance into human life at once intimately and broadly.

Somewhat dissociated in appearance from those character-

istics of Wordsworth which we have already mentioned, but demonstrably compatible with them, was his strong sense of the antique ; his lively interest in the traditional, the legendary, and the historical. We see in Wordsworth, in this respect, a certain similarity to a man from whom otherwise he differed much—Sir Walter Scott. The English poet seems to have had the same liking for significant anecdotes and snatches of ancient song and ballad, the same reverence for pedigree, and the same pleasure in associating places known to him with celebrated transactions of the past, as were observable, in still larger degree, in the Scottish novelist. Among the poems that exemplify this characteristic of our author are, the dramatic poem of *The Borderers* ; the beautiful poem entitled *Hart-leap Well* ; the long legendary poem of *The White Doe of Rylstone*, which is in the metre, and somewhat in the style, of much of Scott's poetry ; and also many of the shorter pieces written during tours in Scotland, and in various parts of England. A particular illustration of this quality of Wordsworth's mind is also presented in his Scott-like habit of introducing almost lovingly topographical references and the names of places into his verse. Thus, in the poem *To Joanna*, describing the echo of a lady's laugh heard among the mountains :—

“ The rock, like something starting from a sleep,  
Took up the Lady's voice, and laughed again ;  
That ancient woman seated on Helm-crag  
Was ready with her cavern ; Hammar-scar  
And the tall steep of Silverhow sent forth  
A noise of laughter ; Southern Loughrigg heard,  
And Fairfield answered with a mountain tone ;  
Helvellyn far into the clear blue sky  
Carried the Lady's voice ; old Skiddaw blew  
His speaking-trumpet ; back out of the clouds  
Of Glaramara southward came the voice ;  
And Kirkstone tossed it from his misty head.”

But most conspicuously of all the poet has exhibited his interest in the antique and historical, and his power of imaginatively reproducing it, in his fine series of Ecclesiastical Sonnets, wherein he traces, as in a series of bold retrospective glimpses, the history of Christianity in the British Islands. There are passages in these sonnets worth, for their historical effect, many pages of the writings of our ecclesiastical historians.

Of the various other excellences of Wordsworth as a poet and a writer we will particularize but one more—the exquisite propriety and delicacy of his style; his easy and perfect mastery over the element of language. Clearly enough he must have possessed the natural gift of rich and exuberant expression; but it is equally evident that he must have, at a very early period, submitted this natural exuberance to a careful and classic training, and also that he must have bestowed his best pains in finishing, according to his own ideas of correctness, all his compositions individually. Hence greater smoothness and beauty, and more of strict logical coherence in Wordsworth's style than is usual even among careful poets, as well as a more close fitting of the language to the measure of the thought, and a comparative freedom from forced rhymes and jarring evasions of natural forms of words. This appears even in the greater typographical neatness of a printed page of Wordsworth's poetry, as compared, for example, with a printed page of Byron's, the lax and dash-disrupted look of which suggests to practised eyes the notion at once of more energetic genius, and greater literary haste. Specimens of Wordsworth's extreme felicity of expression have already been given in the previous extracts; and in selecting for incessant repetition such poems of his as "We are Seven," and such lines as those famous ones about the "yellow primrose," the public have already indicated their appreciation in his case of this merit in particular. A quotation or two, however, illustrative of the same thing, may here be added. Observe how variously and yet simply the language, in the following instances, pursues the intricacies and adapts itself to the mood of the meaning:—

"A village churchyard, lying as it does in the lap of Nature, may indeed be most favourably contrasted with that of a town of crowded population; and sepulture therein combines many of the best tendencies which belong to the mode practised by the ancients, with others peculiar to itself. The sensations of pious cheerfulness which attend the celebration of the Sabbath-day in rural places, are profitably chastised by the sight of the graves of kindred and friends, gathered together in that general home towards which the thoughtful yet happy spectators themselves are journeying. Hence, a parish church, in the stillness of the country, is a visible centre of a community of the living and the dead; a point to which are habitually referred the nearest concerns of both."—*Essay on Epitaphs*.



"To all that binds the soul in powerless trance,  
Lip-dewing song, and ringlet-tossing dance."

*Descriptive Sketches.*

"She dwelt among the untrodden ways  
Beside the springs of Dove,  
A maid whom there were none to praise,  
And very few to love :

A violet by a mossy stone  
Half hidden from the eye !  
Fair as a star when only one  
Is shining in the sky !

She lived unknown, and few could know  
When Lucy ceased to be ;  
But she is in her grave, and, oh,  
The difference to me !"

*Miscellaneous Poems.*

"Then up I rose,  
And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash  
And merciless ravage ; and the shady nook  
Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,  
Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up  
Their quiet being : and, unless I now  
Confound my present feelings with the past ;  
Ere from the mutilated bower I turned  
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,  
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld  
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky."

*Nutting.*

"Great God ! I'd rather be  
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn ;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn ;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea ;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathéd horn."

*Sonnets.*

"Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room ;  
And hermits are contented with their cells ;  
And students with their pensive citadels ;  
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,  
Sit blithe and happy ; bees that soar for bloom,  
High as the highest peak of Furness-fells,  
Will murmur by the hour in fox-glove bells :  
In truth, the prison, unto which we doom  
Ourselves, no prison is : and hence to me,  
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound  
Within the sonnet's scanty plot of ground ;  
Pleased if some souls (for such there needs must be)  
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,  
Should find brief solace there as I have found."

*Sonnets.*

That we would assign to Wordsworth a high place among the poets of England, the whole tenor of our observations hitherto will have made clear. At the same time, that he falls short of the very highest rank ; that he stands not on the top of our English Parnassus, where Chaucer, Milton, and Spenser keep reverent company with Shakespeare, but rather on that upper slope of the mountain whence these greatest are visible,

and where various other poets, some of whom are not yet dead, hold perhaps as just if not so fixed a footing; this, also, we trust we have been able to convey as part of our general impression. We do not think, for example, that Wordsworth was by any means so great a poet as Burns—comparing the two, we mean, even as poets; and if it is only in respect of general mental vigour and capacity, and not in respect of poetic genius *per se*, that such other men as Dryden, Pope, and Coleridge, could be justly put in comparison with Wordsworth, and, being so put in comparison, preferred to him on the whole; yet there are other names still in our list of poets, for whom, even after the ground of competition has been thus restricted, we believe it would be possible to take up the quarrel. With all the faults of Byron, both moral and literary, we believe that in him the poetic efflux came from greater constitutional depths, and brought, if less pure, at least more fervent matter along with it than the poetry of Wordsworth; had Keats and Shelley lived longer, even those that sneer at the Byronic might have seen poets comparable, in their estimation, to the Patriarch of the Lakes; and should our noble Tennyson survive to us as a constant writer till his black locks have grown grey, we, for our part, see qualities in him that predict for him more than a Wordsworth's fame. Keeping in view, therefore, these comparisons and contrasts, it seems proper that we should add to the foregoing enumeration of what we consider some of Wordsworth's characteristic excellences, a word or two descriptive of those accompanying defects to which it was probably owing that a man, so near the highest, did not quite reach it.

First of all, then, as it seems to us, the intellect of Wordsworth, though very far beyond ordinary in its dimensions, and very assiduously developed by culture, was by no means of the largest known English calibre. Not to bring into the comparison such rare giants of our nation as Shakespeare, Bacon, and Milton, there have been, and probably still are, very many distinguished men in our island fit to rank intellectually as the peers of Wordsworth, or even as his superiors. Making the necessary discrimination between native intel-

lectual strength to arrive at conclusions, and the soundness of the conclusions arrived at, we should say that Johnson, Burke, Burns, David Hume, and not a few others that might be named, were presumably men of more powerful intellect than Wordsworth. Partly owing to the time at which they lived, partly owing to causes for which they were personally more responsible, the intellectual conclusions of those men, or of some of them, may have been less noble and lofty than those of Wordsworth; their favourite forms of thought more coarse; their philosophy less true, deep, and ethereal. But their intellectual strength or grasp, their sense and insight, their whole available power to do, discern, and invent, were, we think, greater. Even of Pope, on whose reputation as a poet Wordsworth and his followers have been, in some respects justly, so severe, it might be maintained that, comparison of poetic merit apart, his was the denser and nimbler brain. Nor, we believe, would the greatest admirers of Wordsworth say that in force and reach of intellect he excelled his friend Coleridge. Fine, stately, and silvery as Wordsworth's prose writings are, they want the depth, originality, and richness of the similar compositions of the old man eloquent. Wordsworth's, in short, was not a massive or prodigious, but only a high and superior intellect. Now, though we have already shown that it is not intellect as such that makes a man a poet, but that either a man may have a great intellect and be no poet, or may be a poet without having an extraordinary intellect; yet, having shown also that to constitute a great poet great intellect is essential, we may, in fact, assume it as a rule that the measure of the general intellectual power of any particular poet is also so far a measure of his poetic excellence. According to this rule we should first apply the intellectual test, so as to decide Wordsworth's place (probably beside such men as Coleridge and Dryden) in our general hierarchy of English men of letters of all sorts taken together; then, dividing this miscellaneous body into kinds or classes, we should retain Wordsworth exactly at his ascertained height among the poets; and, lastly, allowing to the whole class of poets as much additional elevation as might be thought

necessary, on the score of the inherent superiority of the poetical constitution as such, we should fix Wordsworth's just place among all the ornaments of English literature.

A second defect in Wordsworth, as a poet, is his want of humour. This charge has been made so often against other celebrated writers, that one is almost ashamed to bring it forward again in any new case whatever. Nevertheless, it is a charge of real weight against any one regarding whom it can be substantiated; and it is hardly necessary to offer any proofs that it is true regarding Wordsworth. There are, indeed, poems of his, such as *The Waggoner*, *The Idiot Boy*, and the *Street Musician*, that display a kind of genial and warm interest in the little pleasant blunders and less than tragic mishaps of daily life; but in such instances we seem to recognise the air of the poet as that of a sedate old gentleman looking at matters, or hearing of them, with a hard benevolent smile, rather than as that of a man of hearty native humour, recklessly enjoying what is jocose. There is no real mirth, no rich sense of the comic, in all that Wordsworth has written. In that full sly love of a jest that must have lurked in the down-looking eye of Chaucer, as well as in the broad and manly capacity of laughter that distinguished Burns, the poet of the Lakes was totally wanting. Hence it is, that among all his characters, he has given us none such as the Host of the Tabard in the *Canterbury Pilgrimage*; and that living, as he did, in a notable part of England, the whole spirit and peculiarity of which he sought to make his own, he could not imbibe nor reproduce its humours. Whenever, in obedience apparently to an intellectual perception of the existence in society of such so-called "humours," he attempts to introduce them into his poetry, he either only reaches the playful, or betrays his natural seriousness by keeping the moral lesson strictly in view. Now, although there have been really great poets, as, for example, Milton and Schiller, in whom this defect of humour was as marked as in Wordsworth, if not more so, yet in such cases it will be found that the defect did, after all, operate to some extent injuriously, and had to be made good in some way by very ample compensations. If Milton had not humour, he had

a large measure of what may properly enough be called wit, an infinite power of scorn, and a tremendous mastery of the language of abuse and sarcasm. As regards Byron, also, not to mention Pope, it is impossible to say how much not only of his popularity, but also of his real worth as a poet, may depend on the quantity of admirable wit which he brought into the service of the Muses. But in Wordsworth there is almost as little of wit, properly so called, as of humour. His moods are a benevolent seriousness, a rapt and spiritual state of the feelings, and a mild and sacerdotal sympathy with all that he sees. He may feel contempt, as indeed few men are said to have done in a greater degree, but he has no art in the ludicrous expression of it; he sometimes smiles, but he never laughs. And in a poet of actual English life, above all, this is to be regarded as a considerable disqualification.

We hardly know how to indicate what we conceive to be another deficiency in Wordsworth as a poet, otherwise than by repeating the common criticism regarding him, that he lacks energy, fire, impulse, intensity, passion. Our previous remarks will have guarded against any misconception of what we here mean. We believe that Wordsworth was, according to his own definition of a poet, "a man endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, than are supposed to be common among mankind;" but what we now mean is something quite consistent with this. There was no tremendousness, nothing of the demoniac, nothing of the Pythic, in the nature of Wordsworth.

"I surely not a man ungently made,"

are the fitting words he uses in describing himself. A calm, white-haired man, that could thrill to the beauty of a starry night, and not a swart-faced Titan like Burns, full of strength and fire, was the poet of the *Excursion*. With all his pathos, and all his clearness of vision, there were sorrows of humanity he never touched, recesses of dark moral experience he could not pierce nor irradiate. We feel in his poetry as if we were talked with by some mild and persuasive preacher, rather than borne down by the experienced utterance of a large-



hearted man. He does not move us to the depths of our being; he only affects us gently. Now, one reason for this must evidently be, that naturally and by birth Wordsworth was deficient in some of the more formidable elements that enter into the constitution of man. Possessing in large degree the elements of intellect, sensibility, and imagination, he seems to have been wanting in the Byronic element of personal impetus or passion. Moreover, and partly in consequence of this, he appears to have passed through the battle of life all but unwounded. This of itself would account for the placid, self-possessed, and often feeble style of his poetry. In the life of every man distinguished for what is called intensity of character, there will almost certainly be found some sore biographical circumstance—some fact deeper and more momentous than all the rest—some strictly historical source of melancholy, that must be discovered and investigated, if we would comprehend his ways. Man comes into this world regardless and unformed; and although, in his gradual progress through it he necessarily acquires, by the mere use of his senses and by communication with others, a multitudinous store of impressions and convictions, yet, if there is to be anything specific and original in his life, this, it would seem, can only be produced by the operation upon him of some one overbearing accident or event, that, rousing him to new wakefulness, and evoking all that is latent in his nature, shall bind these impressions and convictions in a mass together, breathe through them the stern element of personal concern, and impart to them its seal and pressure. The experiences that most commonly perform this great function in the lives of men are those of Friendship and Love. The power of Love to rouse men to larger and more fervid views of nature has been celebrated since the beginning of time. A man that has once undergone Love's sorrow in any extreme degree, is by that fact awakened at once and for ever to the melancholy side of things; he becomes alive to the gloomy in nature and to the miserable in life; and by one stupendous resumption, as it were, of stars, clouds, trees, and flowers into his own pained being, like an old coinage requiring re-issue, he



realizes how it is that all creation groaneth and travaileth together in spirit until now. So also, though perhaps more rarely, with the influence of exalted and lost Friendship. But Wordsworth, happily for himself, seems to have met with no such accident of revolution. Passing through the world as a pilgrim, pure-minded, and even sad with the sense of the mysterious future, nothing occurred in his little journey to strike him down as a dead man, and agonize him into a full knowledge of the whole mystery of the present. Hence, as we believe, the want of that intensity in his poetry which we find in the writings, not only of the so-called subjective poets, such as Byron and Dante, but also of the greatest objective poets, as Goethe and Shakespeare. The ink of Wordsworth is never his own blood.

It is little more than an extension of the preceding remark, to say that Wordsworth was rather a poet or bard than (if we may be allowed such a distinction) a lyrist or minstrel. The purpose of the poet, using the term for the moment in this restricted sense, is simply to describe, narrate, or represent some portion of the external, as it is rounded out and made significant in his own mind; the purpose of the lyrist or minstrel is to pour forth the passing emotions of his soul, and inflame other men with the fire that consumes himself. Accordingly, the faculties most special to the merely poetic exercise, as in the old Homeric epos or in modern descriptive verse, are those of intellect, sensibility, and imagination—passion or personal excitement being but a separate ingredient which may be more or less present according to circumstances, and which ought, as some think, to be absent from pure poetry altogether: whereas, in lyrical effusion, on the other hand, passion or present excitement is nearly all in all. The poetry of Keats may be taken as a specimen of pure poetry as such: all his chief poems are literally *compositions* or creations, the results of a process by which the poet's mind, having projected itself into an entirely imaginary element, as devoid as possible of all connexion with or similarity to the present, worked and moved therein slowly and fantastically at its own will and pleasure. As specimens, again, of the

purely lyrical, we have all such pieces, ancient and modern, as are properly denominated psalms, odes, hymns, or songs. When, therefore, people talk, as they now incessantly do, of calmness as being essential to the poet; and when, with Wordsworth, they define the poetic art to consist in the tranquil recollection of bygone emotion, it is clear that they can have in view only pure poetry, the end of which, as we have said, is to represent in an imaginative manner some portion of the outward. For, of the lyrist or song-writer we would affirm, precisely as we would affirm of his near kinsman, the orator, that the more of passion or personal impetus he has the better; and so far from advising him to wait for complete tranquillity, we would advise him to select as the true lyrical moment, that first moment, whenever it is, when the primary perturbation of his soul has just so far subsided that his trembling hands can sweep the strings. But along with this difference comes another. The poet, in describing his scene or narrating his story, feels himself impelled to every legitimate mode of increasing the pleasure he conveys; and the result, in one direction, is Metre. But however natural Metre may have been in its origin, it has now become to the poet rather a pre-established arrangement or available set of conditions to the rule of which, voluntarily and guided by his instinct for harmony, he adapts what he has already in other respects rendered complete, than a compulsory suggestion of the poetic act itself careful for its own accoutrement. Not so, however, with the lyrist. As cadence or musical utterance is natural in an excited state of the feelings, so in lyrical poetry ought the song or melody to be more than the words. The heart of the lyrist should be a perpetual fountain of song; and when he is to hold direct communication with the world, an inarticulate hum or murmur, rising, as it were, from the depths of his being, ought to precede and necessitate all his actual speech. Now in this lyrical capability, this love of sound or cadence for its own sake, (in which, by the bye, we have remarked that the Scotch generally excel the English,) Wordsworth is certainly inferior to many other poets. One might have inferred as much from the narrowness of his

theory of verse; but the fact is rendered still more apparent by a perusal of his poetical compositions themselves. Very few poets, we think, have been more admirable masters of poetic metre: no versification that we know is more rich, various, and flexible, or more soothing to the ear than that of Wordsworth. But he is not a singer or a minstrel properly so called; the lyric madness does not seize him; verse with him is rather an exquisite variety of rhetoric, a legitimate æsthetic device, than a necessary form of utterance. We do not think that in all Wordsworth there is a single stanza after reading which and quite losing sight of the words, we are still haunted (as we constantly are in Burns, Byron, and Tennyson) by an obstinate recollection of the tune. Were we required to say in what particular portion of Wordsworth's poetry he has shown most of this true lyric spirit, in which we believe him to have been on the whole deficient, we should unhesitatingly mention his Sonnets. These are among the finest and most sonorous things in our language; and it is by them, in connexion with his large poem *The Excursion*, or as we may now say, *The Recluse*, that his great reputation will be most surely perpetuated.

## SCOTTISH INFLUENCE IN BRITISH LITERATURE.\*

It was in the winter of 1786-87 that the poet Burns, a new prospect having been suddenly opened up to him by the kind intervention of Blacklock, and a few other influential men in Edinburgh, abandoned his desperate project of emigrating to the West Indies, and hastened to pay his first and memorable visit to the Scottish metropolis. During that winter, as all who are acquainted with his life know, the Ayrshire ploughman, then in his twenty-ninth year, was the lion of Edinburgh society. Lord Monboddo, Dugald Stewart, Harry Erskine, Dr. Robertson, Dr. Hugh Blair, Henry Mackenzie, Dr. Gregory, Dr. Black, Dr. Adam Ferguson—such were the names then most conspicuous in the literary capital of North Britain; and it was in the company of these men, alternated with that of the Creeches, the Smellies, the Willie Nicols, and other contemporary Edinburgh celebrities of a lower grade, that Burns first realized the fact that he was no mere bard of local note, but a new power and magnate in Scottish literature.

To those who are alive to the poetry of coincidences, two anecdotes connected with this residence of Burns in Edinburgh will always be interesting. What reader of Lockhart's *Life of Scott* is there who does not remember the account there given of Scott's first and only interview with Burns? As the story is now more minutely told in Mr. Robert Chambers's *Life of Burns*, Scott, who was then a lad of sixteen, just

\* NORTH BRITISH REVIEW: August, 1852.—*Life of Lord Jeffrey ; with a Selection from his Correspondence.* By LORD COCKBURN, one of the Judges of the Court of Session in Scotland. 2 vols. 1852. [What is here printed is only the introductory part of the article as it stood in the Review.]

removed from the High School to a desk in his father's office, was invited by his friend and companion, the son of Dr. Ferguson, to accompany him to *his* father's house on an evening when Burns was to be there. The two youngsters entered the room, sat down unnoticed by their seniors, and looked on and listened in modest silence. Burns, when he came in, seemed a little out of his element, and, instead of mingling at once with the company, kept going about the room, looking at the pictures on the walls. One print particularly arrested his attention. It represented a soldier lying dead among the snow, his dog on one side, and a woman with a child in her arms on the other. Underneath the print were some lines of verse descriptive of the subject, which Burns read aloud with a voice faltering with emotion. A little while after, turning to the company and pointing to the print, he asked if any one could tell him who was the author of the lines. No one chanced to know, excepting Scott, who remembered that they were from an obscure poem of Langhorne's. The information, whispered by Scott to some one near, was repeated to Burns, who, after asking a little more about the matter, rewarded his young informant with a look of kindly interest, and the words, (Sir Adam Ferguson reports them,) "You'll be a man yet, sir." Such is the one story, the story of the "literary ordination," as Mr. Chambers well calls it, of Scott by Burns—a scene which we think Sir William Allan would have delighted to paint. The other story, we believe, is now told for the first time by Lord Cockburn. Somewhere about the very day on which the foregoing incident happened, "a little black creature" of a boy, we are told, who was going up the High Street of Edinburgh, and staring diligently about him, was attracted by the appearance of a man whom he saw standing on the pavement. He was taking a good and leisurely view of the object of his curiosity, when some one standing at a shop-door tapped him on the shoulder, and said, "Ay, laddie, ye may weel look at that man! that's Robert Burns." The "little black creature," thus early addicted to criticism, was Francis Jeffrey, the junior of Scott by two years, and exactly four years behind him in the

classes of the High School, where he was known as a clever nervous little fellow, who never lost a place without crying. It is mentioned as a curious fact by Lord Cockburn, that Jeffrey's first teacher at the High School, a Mr. Luke Fraser, had the singular good fortune of sending forth, from three successive classes of four years each, three pupils no less distinguished than Walter Scott, Francis Jeffrey, and Henry Brougham.

It is not for the mere purpose of anecdote that we cite these names and coincidences. We should like very much to make out for Scotland in general as suggestive a series of her intellectual representatives as Lord Cockburn has here made out for part of the pedagogic era of the worthy and long dead Mr. Luke Fraser. Confining our regards to the eighteenth century, the preceding paragraphs enable us to group together at least three conspicuous Scottish names as belonging, by right of birth, to the third quarter of that century—Burns, born in Ayrshire in 1759 ; Scott, born in Edinburgh in 1771 ; and Jeffrey, born in the same place in 1773. Supposing we go a little farther back for some other prominent Scottish names of the same century, the readiest to occur to the memory will be those of James Thomson, the poet, born in Roxburghshire in 1700 ; Thomas Reid, the philosopher, born near Aberdeen in 1710 ; David Hume, born at Edinburgh in 1711 ; Robertson, the historian, born in Mid-Lothian in 1721 ; Tobias Smollett, the novelist, born at Cardross in the same year ; Adam Smith, born at Kirkaldy in 1723 ; Robert Fergusson, the Scottish poet, born at Edinburgh in 1750 ; and Dugald Stewart, born at Edinburgh in 1753. And if for a similar purpose, we come down to the last quarter of the century, five names at least will be sure to occur to us, in addition to that of Brougham—Thomas Campbell, born at Glasgow in 1777 ; Thomas Chalmers, born at Anstruther in Fifeshire in 1780 ; John Wilson, born, if we may trust our authorities, at Paisley in 1788 ; Thomas Carlyle, born at Ecclefechan in Dumfries-shire in 1795 ; and Sir William Hamilton, born at Glasgow before the close of the century. In this list we omit the distinguished contemporary Scottish



names in physical science; we ought not, however, to omit the names of Sir James Mackintosh, born near Inverness in 1765; and James Mill, born at Montrose in 1773. The short life of Burns, if we choose him as the central figure of the group, connects together all these names. The oldest of them was in the prime of life when Burns was born, and the youngest of them had seen the light before Burns died.

On glancing in order along this series of eminent Scotchmen born in the eighteenth century, it will be seen that they may be roughly distributed into two nearly equal classes—men of philosophic intellect, devoted to the work of general speculation, or thought as such; and men of literary or poetic genius, whose works belong more properly to the category of pure literary or artistic effort. In the one class may be ranked Reid, Hume, Adam Smith, Dugald Stewart, Mackintosh, Mill, Chalmers, and Sir William Hamilton; in the other, Thomson, Smollett, Robertson, Fergusson, Burns, Scott, Jeffrey, Campbell, Wilson, Irving, and Carlyle. Do not let us be mistaken. In using the phrases “philosophic intellect” and “literary genius,” to denote the distinction referred to, we do not imply anything of accurate discrimination between the phrases themselves. For aught that we care, the phrases may be reversed, and the men of the one class may be styled men of philosophic genius; and those of the other, men of literary habit and intellect. If we prefer to follow the popular usage in our application of the terms, it is not with any intention of making out for the one class, by the appropriation to it of the peculiar term “genius,” a certificate of a higher kind of excellence than belongs to the other. Even according to the popular acceptation of the term, several of those whom we have included in the literary category—as, for example, Robertson—must be denied the title of men of genius: while, according to no endurable definition of the term, could the title of men of genius be refused to such men as Adam Smith, or Chalmers, or Hamilton. Nor even, when thus explained, will our classification bear any very rigid scrutiny. By a considerable portion of what may be called the fundamental or unapparent half of his genius, Carlyle

belongs to the class of speculative thinkers; while, on the other hand, the case of Chalmers is one in which the thinking or speculative faculty, which certainly belonged to him, was surcharged and deluged by such a constant flood from the feelings that, instead of ranking him with the thinkers as above, we might, with equal or greater propriety, transpose him to the other side, or even name him on both sides. His thinking faculty, which was what he himself set most store by, was so beset and begirt by his other and more active dispositions, that instead of working on and on through any resisting medium with iron continuity, it discharged itself almost invariably, as soon as it touched a subject, in large proximate generalizations. On the whole, then, instead of the foregoing classification of eminent Scotchmen into men of speculation and men of general literature, one might adopt as equally serviceable a less formal classification which the common satirical talk respecting Scotchmen will suggest. The hard, cool, logical Scotchman—such is the stereotyped phrase in which Englishmen describe the natives of North Britain. There is a sufficient amount of true perception in the phrase to justify its use; but the appreciation it involves reaches only to the surface. The well-known phrase, *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum*, used, Buchanan tells us, centuries ago on the Continent to express the idea of the Scottish character then universally current, and founded on a large induction of instances, is, in reality, far nearer to the fact. Without maintaining at present that *all* Scotchmen are perfervid,—that Scotchmen in general are, as we have seen it ingeniously argued, not cool, calculating, and cautious, but positively rash, fanatical, and tempestuous,—it will be enough to refer to the instances which prove at least that *some* Scotchmen have this character. The thing may be expressed thus:—On referring to the actual list of Scotchmen who have attained eminence by their writings or speeches in this or the last century, two types may be distinguished, in one or the other of which the Scottish mind seems necessarily to cast itself—an intellectual type specifically Scottish, but Scottish only in the sense that it is the type which cultured Scottish minds assume when

they devote themselves to the work of specific investigation; and a more popular type, characterizing those Scotchmen who, instead of pursuing the work of specific investigation, follow a career calling forth all the resources of Scottish sentiment. Scotchmen of the first or more fixed and formal type are Reid, Smith, Hume, Mill, Mackintosh, and Hamilton; in all of whom, notwithstanding their differences, we see that tendency towards metaphysical speculation for which the Scottish mind has become celebrated. Scotchmen of the other or popular type, partaking of the metaphysical tendency or not, but drawing their essential inspiration from the sentimental depths of the national character, are Burns, Scott, Chalmers, Irving, and Carlyle. However we may choose to express it, the fact of this twofold forthgoing of the Scottish mind, either in the scholastic and logical direction marked out by one series of eminent predecessors, or in the popular and literary direction marked out by another series of eminent predecessors, cannot be denied.

After all, however, there is, classify and distinguish as we may, a remarkable degree of homogeneousness among Scotchmen. The people of North Britain are more homogeneous—have decidedly a more visible basis of common character—than the people of South Britain. A Scotchman may indeed be almost anything that is possible in this world; he may be a saint or a debauchee, a Christian or a sceptic, a spendthrift or a usurer, a soldier or a statesman, a poet or a statistician, a fool or a man of genius, clear-headed or confused-headed, a Thomas Chalmers or a Joseph Hume, a dry man of mere secular facts, or a man through whose mind there roll for ever the stars and all mysteries. Still, under every possible form of mental combination or activity, there will be found in every Scotchman something distinguishable as his birth-quality or *Scotticism*. And what is this *Scotticism* of Scotchmen—this ineradicable, universally-combinable element or peculiarity, breathed into the Scottish soul by those conditions of nature and of life which inhere in or hover over the area of the Scottish earth, and which are repeated in the same precise *ensemble* nowhere else? Comes it from the hills, or the moors, or the

mists, or any of those other features of scenery and climate which distinguish bleak and rugged Scotland from green and fertile England? In part, doubtless, from these, as from all else that is Scottish. But there are hills, and moors, and mists where Scotchmen are not bred; and it is rather in the long series of the memorable things that have been done on the Scottish hills and moors—the acts which the retrospective eye sees flashing through the old Scottish mists—that one is to seek the origin and explanation of whatever Scotticism is. Now, as compared with England at least, that which has come down to the natives of Scotland as something peculiar, generated by the series of past transactions of which their country has been the scene, is an intense spirit of nationality.

No nation in the world is more factitious than the Scotch—more composite as regards the materials out of which it has been constructed. If in England there have been Britons, Celts, Romans, Saxons, Danes, and Normans, in Scotland there have been Celts, Britons, Romans, Norwegians, Danes, Anglo-Saxons, and Normans. The only difference of any consequence in this respect probably is, that whereas in England the Celtic element is derived chiefly from the British or Welsh, and the Gothic element chiefly from the Teutonic or Continental-German source, in Scotland the Gaels have furnished most of the Celtic, and the Scandinavian Germans most of the Gothic element. Nor, if we regard the agencies that have acted intellectually on the two nations, shall we find Scotland to have been less notably affected from without than England. To mention only one circumstance, the Reformation in Scotland was marked by a much more decided importation of new modes of thinking and new social forms than the Reformation in the sister country. But though quite as factitious, therefore, as the English nation, the Scottish, by reason of its very smallness, for one thing, has always possessed a more intense consciousness of its nationality, and a greater liability to be acted upon throughout its whole substance by a common thought or common feeling. Even as late as the year 1707, the entire population of Scotland did not exceed one million of individuals; and if, going farther back,



we fancy this small nation placed on the frontier of one so much larger, and obliged continually to defend itself against the attacks of so powerful a neighbour, we can have no difficulty in conceiving how, in the smaller nation, the feeling of a central life would be sooner developed and kept more continuously active. The sentiment of nationality is essentially negative; it is the sentiment of a people which has been taught to recognise its own individuality by incessantly marking the line of exclusion between itself and others. Almost all the great movements of Scotland, as a nation, have accordingly been of a negative character, that is, movements of self-defence—the War of National Independence against the Edwards; the Non-Episcopal struggle in the reigns of the Charleses; and even the Non-Intrusion controversy of later times. The very motto of Scotland, as a nation, is negative—*Nemo me impune lacesset*. It is different with England. There have of course been negative movements in England too, but these have been movements of one faction or part of the English people against another; and the activity of the English nation, as a whole, has consisted, not in preserving its own individuality from external attack, but in fully and genially evolving the various elements which it finds within itself, or in powerful positive exertions of its strength upon what lies outside it.

The first and most natural form of what we have called the Scotticism of Scotchmen—that is, of the peculiarity which differences them from people of other countries, and more expressly from Englishmen—is this *amor patriæ*, this inordinate intensity of national feeling. There are very few Scotchmen who, whatever they may pretend, are devoid of this pride of being Scotchmen. Penetrate to the heart of any Scotchman, even the most Anglified, or the most philosophic that can be found, and there will certainly be found a remnant in it of loving regard for the little land that lies north of the Tweed. And what eminent Scotchman can be named in whose constitution a larger or smaller proportion of the *amor Scotiæ* has not been visible? In some of the foremost of such men, as Burns, Scott, and Wilson, this *amor Scotiæ* has even been

present as a confessed ingredient of their genius,—a sentiment determining, to a great extent, the style and matter of all that they have written or attempted.

“The rough bur-thistle spreading wide  
 Amang the bearded bear,—  
 I turn’d the weeding-heuk aside,  
 And spared the symbol dear.  
 No nation, no station  
 My envy e’er could raise—  
 A Scot still, but blot still,  
 I knew nae higher praise.”

In reading the writings of such men, one is perpetually reminded, in the most direct manner, that these writings are to be regarded as belonging to a strictly national literature. But even in those Scotchmen in the determination of whose intellectual efforts the *amor Scotiæ* has acted no such obvious and ostensible part, the presence of some mental reference to, or intermittent communication of sentiment with, the land of their birth, is almost sure to be detected. The speculations of Reid and Hume and Adam Smith, and, in some degree, also, those of Chalmers, were on matters interesting not to Scotchmen alone, but to the human race as such; and yet, precisely as these men enunciated their generalities intended for the whole world in good broad Scotch, so had they all, after their different ways, a genuine Scottish relish for Scottish humours, jokes, and antiquities. The same thing is true of Carlyle, a power as he is recognised to be, not in Scottish only, but in all European literature. Even James Mill, who, more than most Scotchmen, succeeded in conforming, both in speech and in writing, to English habits and requirements, relapsed into a Scotchman when he listened to a Scottish song, or told a Scottish anecdote. But perhaps the most interesting example of the appearance of an intense *amor Scotiæ*, where, from the nature of the case, it could have been least expected, is afforded by the writings of Sir William Hamilton. If there is a man now alive conspicuous among his contemporaries for the exercise on the most magnificent scale of an intellect the most pure and abstract, that man is Sir William; and yet, not even when discussing the philosophy of the unconditioned or perfecting the theory of syllogism, does Sir William forget his



Scottish lineage. With what glee, in his notes, or in stray passages in his dissertations themselves, does he seize every opportunity of adding to the proofs that speculation in general has been largely affected by the stream of specific Scottish thought—quoting, for example, the saying of Scaliger, “*Les Ecossois sont bons Philosophes* ;” or dwelling on the fact that at one time almost every continental university had a Scottish professorship of philosophy, specially so named ; or reviving the memories of defunct Balfours, and Duncans, and Chalmerses, and Dalgarnos, and other “*Scoti extra Scotiam agentes*” of other centuries ; or startling his readers with such genealogical facts as that Immanuel Kant and Sir Isaac Newton had Scottish grandfathers, and that the celebrated French metaphysician Destutt Tracy was, in reality, but a transmogrified Scotchman of the name of Stott ! We know nothing more refreshing than such evidences of strong national feeling in such a man. It is the Scottish Stagirite not ashamed of the bonnet and plaid ; it is the philosopher in whose veins flows the blood of a Covenanter.

Even now, when Scotchmen, their native country having been so long merged in the higher unity of Great Britain, labour altogether in the interest of this higher unity, and forget or set aside the smaller, they are still liable to be affected characteristically in all that they do by the consciousness that they are Scotchmen. This will be found true whether we regard those Scotchmen who work side by side with Englishmen in the conduct of British public affairs or British commerce, or those Scotchmen who vie with Englishmen in the walks of British authorship and literature. In either case the Scotchman is distinguished from the Englishman by this, that he carries the consciousness of his nationality about with him. Were he, indeed, disposed to forget it, the banter on the subject to which he is perpetually exposed in the society of his English friends and acquaintances, would serve to keep him in mind of it. It is the same now with the individual Scotchman cast among Englishmen as it was with the Scottish nation when it had to defend its frontier against the English armies. He is in the position of a smaller body placed in

contact with a larger one, and rendered more intensely conscious of his individuality by the constant necessity of asserting it. But this self-assertion of a Scotchman among Englishmen, this constant feeling "I am a Scotchman," rests, like the feeling of nationality itself, on a prior assertion of what is in fact a negative. For a Scotchman to be always thinking "I am a Scotchman," is, in the circumstances now under view, tantamount to always thinking "I am *not* an Englishman." The Englishman, on the other hand, has no corresponding feeling. As a member of the larger body, whose corporate activity has always, from the very circumstance of its being the larger, been positive rather than negative, the Englishman simply acts out harmoniously his English instincts and tendencies; the feeling of not being a Scotchman never (except in the case of a stray Englishman located in Scotland) either spontaneously remaining in his mind, or being roused in it by banter. The Scotchman, in short, who works in the general field of British activity, has his thoughts conditioned, to some extent at least, by the negative of not being an Englishman; the Englishman thinks under no such limitation.

And this leads us to a definition more essential and intimate of the peculiarity of Scottish as compared with English thought. The rudest and most natural form of what we have called the Scotticism of Scotchmen, consists, we have hitherto been saying, in simple consciousness of nationality, simple *amor Scotiæ*, or, under more restricted circumstances, the simple feeling of not being an Englishman. There are some Scotchmen, however, in whom this first and most natural form of Scotticism is not very well pronounced, and who are either emancipated from it, or think that they are. We know not a few Scottish minds who have really succeeded in transferring their enthusiastic regards from Scotland, as such, to the higher unity of Great Britain—men, who, sometimes speaking in their own Scottish accent, sometimes in an accent almost purely English, find the objects of their solicitude and admiration, not in the land lying north of the Tweed, but rather in England—its rich green parks and fields, its broad ecclesiastical hierarchy, its noble halls of learning, its majestic

and varied literature, the full and generous character of its manly people. We know Scotchmen whose sentiment is more deeply stirred by Shakespeare's famous apostrophe to "this England," than by Scott's to the land of brown heath and shaggy wood. And as Scotland and England are now united, such men are and must be on the increase. But even they shall not escape. If their native quality of Scotticism does not survive in them in the more palpable and open form of mere national feeling, mere *amor Scotiæ*, it survives, nevertheless, in an intellectual habit, having the same root, and as indestructible. And what is this habit? The popular charges of dogmatism, opinionativeness, pugnacity, and the like, brought against Scotchmen by Englishmen, are so many approximations to a definition of it. For our part, we should say that the special habit or peculiarity which distinguishes the intellectual manifestations of Scotchmen—that, in short, in which the Scotticism of Scotchmen most intimately consists—is the habit of *emphasis*. All Scotchmen are emphatic. If a Scotchman is a fool, he gives such emphasis to the nonsense he utters, as to be infinitely more insufferable than a fool of any other country; if a Scotchman is a man of genius, he gives such emphasis to the good things he has to communicate, that they have a supremely good chance of being at once or very soon attended to. This habit of emphasis, we believe, is exactly that *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum* which used to be remarked some centuries ago, wherever Scotchmen were known. But emphasis is perhaps a better word than fervour. Many Scotchmen are fervid too, but not all; but all, absolutely all, are emphatic. No one will call Joseph Hume a fervid man, but he is certainly emphatic. And so with David Hume, or Reid, or Adam Smith, or any of those colder-natured Scotchmen of whom we have spoken; fervour cannot be predicated of them, but they had plenty of emphasis. In men like Burns, or Chalmers, or Irving, on the other hand, there was both emphasis and fervour; so also with Carlyle; and so, under a still more curious combination, with Sir William Hamilton. And as we distinguish emphasis from fervour, so would we

distinguish it from perseverance. Scotchmen are said to be persevering, but the saying is not universally true ; Scotchmen are or are not morally persevering, but all Scotchmen are intellectually emphatic. Emphasis, we repeat, intellectual emphasis, the habit of laying stress on certain things rather than co-ordinating all, in this consists what is essential in the Scotticism of Scotchmen. And, as this observation is empirically verified by the very manner in which Scotchmen enunciate their words in ordinary talk, so it might be deduced scientifically from what we have already said regarding the nature and effects of the feeling of nationality. The habit of thinking emphatically is a necessary result of thinking much in the presence of, and in resistance to, a negative ; it is the habit of a people that has been accustomed to act on the defensive, rather than of a people peacefully self-evolved and accustomed to act positively ; it is the habit of Protestantism rather than of Catholicism, of Presbyterianism rather than of Episcopacy, of Dissent rather than of Conformity.

The greatest effects which the Scottish mind has yet produced on the world—and these effects, by the confession of Englishmen themselves, have not been small—have been the results, in part at least, of this national habit of emphasis. Until towards the close of last century, the special department of labour in which Scotchmen had, to any great extent, exerted themselves so as to make a figure in the general intellectual world, was the department of Philosophy—Metaphysical and Dialectic. Their triumphs in this department are historical. What is called the Scottish Philosophy constitutes, in the eyes of all who know anything of history, a most important stage in the intellectual evolution of modern times. From the time of those old Duncans, and Balfours, and Dalgarnos, mentioned by Sir William Hamilton, who discoursed on philosophy, and wrote dialectical treatises in Latin in all the cities of the Continent, down to our own days, we can point to a succession of Scottish thinkers in whom the interest in metaphysical studies was kept alive, and by whose labours new contributions to mental science were continually being made. It was by the Scottish mind,

in fact, that the modern philosophy was conducted to that point where Kant and the Germans took it up. The qualifications of the Scottish mind for this task, were, doubtless, various. Perhaps there was something in that special combination of the Celtic and the Scandinavian out of which the Scottish nation, for the most part, took its rise, to produce an aptitude for dialectical exercises. Nay, farther, it would not be altogether fanciful to suppose that those very national struggles of the Scotch in the course of which they acquired so strong a sense of their national individuality—that is, of the distinction between all that was Scotch and all that was not Scotch—served, in a rough way, to facilitate to all Scotchmen that fundamental idea of the distinction between the *Ego* and the *Non-Ego*, the clear and rigorous apprehension of which is the first step in philosophy, and the one test of the philosopher. But, in a still more important degree, we hold the success of the Scottish mind in philosophy to have been the result of the national habit of intellectual emphasis. A Scotchman, when he thinks, cannot, so easily and comfortably as the Englishman, repose on an upper level of propositions co-ordinated for him by tradition, sweet feeling, and pleasant circumstance; that necessity of his nature which leads him to emphasise certain things rather than to take all things together in their established co-ordination, drives him down and still down in search of certain generalities whereon he may see that all can be built. It was this habit of emphasis, this inability to rest on the level of sweetly-composed experience, that led Hume to scepticism; it was the same habit, the same inability, conjoined however with more of faith and reverence, that led Reid to lay down in the chasm of Hume's scepticism certain blocks of ultimate propositions or principles, capable of being individually enumerated, and yet, as he thought, forming a sufficient basement for all that men think or believe. And the same tendency is visible among Scotchmen now. It amazes Scotchmen at the present day to see on what proximate propositions even Englishmen who are celebrated as thinkers can rest in their speculations. The truth is that, if Scotch-



men have, so far, a source of superiority over Englishmen in their habit of dwelling only on the emphatic, they have also in this same habit a source of inferiority. Quietism ; mysticism ; that soft, meditative disposition which takes things for granted in the co-ordination established by mere life and usage, pouring into the confusion thus externally given the rich oil of an abounding inner joy, interpenetrating all and harmonizing all—these are, for the most part, alien to the Scotchman. No, his walk, as a thinker, is not by the meadows and the wheat-fields, and the green lanes, and the ivy-clad parish churches, where all is gentle, and antique, and fertile, but by the bleak sea-shore which parts the certain from the limitless, where there is doubt in the sea-mew's shriek, and where it is well if, in the advancing tide, he can find footing on a rock among the tangle ! But this very tendency of his towards what is intellectually extreme, injures his sense of proportion in what is concrete and actual ; and hence it is that when he leaves the field of abstract thought, and betakes himself to creative literature, he so seldom produces anything comparable in fulness, wealth, and harmoniousness to the imaginations of a Chaucer or a Shakespeare. The highest genius, indeed, involves also the capability of the intellectually extreme ; and accordingly, in the writings of those great Englishmen, as well as in those of the living English poet Tennyson, there are strokes in abundance of that pure intellectual emphasis in which the Scotchman delights ; but then there is also with them such a genial acceptance of all things, great or small, in their established co-ordination, that the flashes of emphasis are as if they came not from a battle done on an open moor, but from a battle transacting itself in the depths of a forest. Among Scottish thinkers, Mackintosh is the one that approaches nearest to the English model—a circumstance which may be accounted for by the fact that much of what he did consisted, from the necessities of the object-matter of his speculations, in judicious compromise.

But even in the field of literature we will not abandon the Scotchman. His habit of emphasis has here enabled him to



do good service too. His entry on this field, however, was later than his entry on the field of philosophy. True, there had been, contemporary with the Scottish philosophers, or even anterior to them, Scottish poets and general prose-writers of note—Dunbar, Gawain Douglas, King James, Buchanan, Sir David Lindsay, Henderson, Sir George Mackenzie, Allan Ramsay, and the like. True, also, in those; snatches of popular ballad and song which came down from generation to generation in Scotland—many of them written by no one knows who, and almost all of them overflowing with either humour or melancholy—there was at once a fountain and a promise of an exquisite national literature. We could think of old Nicol Burn, the “violer,” till our eyes filled with tears.

“ But minstrel Burn cannot assuage  
 His woes while time endureth,  
 To see the changes of this age  
 Which fleeting time procureth.  
 Full many a place stands in hard case  
 Where joy was wont beforrow,  
 With Humes that dwelt on Leader braes,  
 And Scotts that dwelt on Yarrow.”

There was literature in the times when such old strains were sung. But the true avatar of the Scottish mind in modern literature, came later than the manifestation of the same mind in philosophy. Were we to fix a precise date for it, we should name the period of Burns's first visit to Edinburgh and familiar meetings with the men of literary talent and distinction then assembled there. Edinburgh was, indeed, even then a literary capital, boasting of its Monboddos, and Stewarts, and Robertsons, and Blairs, and Mackenzies, and Gregorys—men who had already begun the race of literary rivalry with their contemporaries south of the Tweed. But, so far as the literary excellence of these men did not depend on their participation in that tendency to abstract thinking which had already produced its special fruit in the Scottish Philosophy, it consisted in little more than a reflection or imitation of what was already common and acknowledged in the prior or contemporary literature of South Britain. To write essays such as those of the

*Spectator*; to be master of a style which Englishmen should pronounce pure, and to produce compositions in that style worthy of being ranked with the compositions of English authors—such was the aim and aspiration of Edinburgh *literati*, between whom and their London cousins there was all the difference that there is between the latitude of Edinburgh and the latitude of London, between the daily use of the broad Scotch dialect and the daily use of the classic English. For Scotland this mere imitation of English models was but a poor and unsatisfactory vein of literary enterprise. What was necessary was the appearance of some man of genius who should flash through all that, and who, by the application to literature, or the art of universal expression, of that same Scottish habit of emphasis which had already produced such striking and original results in philosophy, should teach the Scottish nation its true power in literature, and show a first example of it. Such a man was Burns. He it was who, uniting emotional fervour with intellectual emphasis, and drawing his inspiration from all those depths of sentiment in the Scottish people which his predecessors, the philosophers, had hardly so much as touched, struck for the first time a new chord, and revealed for the first time what a Scottish writer could do by trusting to the whole wealth of Scottish resources. And from the time of Burns, accordingly, there has been a series of eminent literary Scotchmen quite different from that series of hard logical Scotchmen who had till then been the most conspicuous representatives of their country in the eyes of the reading public of Great Britain—a series of Scotchmen displaying to the world the power of emphatic sentiment and emphatic expression as strikingly as their predecessors had displayed the power of emphatic reasoning. While the old philosophic energy of Scotland still remained unexhausted—the honours of Reid, and Hume, and Smith, and Stewart passing on to such men as Brown, and Mill, and Mackintosh, and Hamilton (in favour of the last of whom even Germany has resigned her philosophic interregnum)—the specially literary energy which had been awakened in the country descended along another line in the

persons of Scott, and Jeffrey, and Chalmers, and Campbell, and Wilson, and Carlyle. Considering the amount of influence exerted by such men upon the whole spirit and substance of British literature, considering how disproportionate a share of the whole literary produce of Great Britain in the nineteenth century has come either from them or from other Scotchmen, and considering what a stamp of peculiarity marks all that portion of this produce which is of Scottish origin, it does not seem too much to say, that the rise and growth of Scottish literature is as notable a historical phenomenon as the rise and growth of the Scottish philosophy. And considering, moreover, how lately Scotland has entered on this literary field, how little time she has had to display her powers, how recently she was in this respect savage, and how much of her savage vitality yet remains to be articulated in civilized books, may we not hope that her literary avatar is but beginning, and has a goodly course yet to run? From the Solway to Caithness we hear a loud Amen!

## THEORIES OF POETRY.\*

THERE have been hundreds of disquisitions on poetry in all ages—long and short, good, bad, and indifferent; and now-a-days, we cannot open a magazine or a review without finding something new said about our friend “*The Poet*,” as distinguished from our other friend “*The Prophet*,” and the like. But cant cannot be helped; and, if we are to abandon good phrases because they have been used a great many times, there is an end to all reviewing. Much, too, as has been spoken about poetry and poets, we doubt if the world, in its lucubrations on this subject, has got far beyond the antithesis suggested by what Aristotle said about it two thousand years ago, on the one hand, and what Bacon advanced two hundred and fifty years ago, on the other. At least, acquainted as we are with a good deal that Wordsworth, and Coleridge, and Goethe, and Leigh Hunt, and now Mr. Dallas, have written about poetry by way of more subtle and insinuating investigation, we still feel that the best notion of the thing, for any manageable purpose, is to be beaten out of the rough-hewn definitions of it, from opposite sides, supplied by Aristotle and Bacon. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle writes as follows:—

“Epic poetry and the poetry of tragedy, as well as comedy and dithyrambic poetry, and most flute and lyre music, all are, in their nature, viewed generally, *imitations* (*μιμήσεις*); differing from each other, however, in three things—either in that they imitate by different means, or in that they imitate different things, or in that they imitate differently and not in the same manner. For, as some artists, either from technical training or from mere habit, imitate various objects by colours and forms, and other artists by vocal sound; so, of the arts mentioned above, all effect their imitation by rhythm, and words and melody, employed either severally or in combination. For example, in flute and lyre music, and in any other kind of music having similar effect, such as pipe music, melody and rhythm are alone used. In the dance, again, the imitation is accomplished by rhythm by itself, without melody; there being dancers who, by means of rhythmical gesticulations, imitate even manners, passions, and acts. Lastly, epic poetry produces its imitations either by mere articulate words, or by metre superadded. . . . .

\* NORTH BRITISH REVIEW; *August*, 1853.—*Poetics: an Essay on Poetry*. By E. S. DALLAS. London, 1852.

Since, in the second place, those who imitate copy living characters, it behoves imitations either to be of serious and lofty, or of mean and trivial objects. The imitation must, in fact, either be of characters and actions better than they are found among ourselves, or worse, or much the same; just as, among painters, Polygnotus represented people better looking than they were, Pauson worse looking, and Dinysius exactly as they were. Now, it is evident that each of the arts above mentioned will have these differences, the difference arising from their imitating different things. In the dance, and in flute and lyre music, these diversities are visible; as also in word imitations and simple metre. Homer, for example, really made men better than they are; Cleophon made them such as they are; whereas Hegemon, the first writer of parodies, and Nicoclareus, made them worse. So also in dithyrambs and lyrics, one might, with Timotheus and Philæxus imitate even Persians and Cyclopes. By this very difference, too, is tragedy distinguished from comedy. The one even now strives in its imitations to exhibit men better than they are, the other worse. . . . Still the third difference remains, namely, as to the manner or form of the imitation. For even though the means of imitation, and the things imitated, should be the same, there might be this difference, that the imitation might be made either in the form of a narration, and that either through an alien narrator, as Homer does, or in one's own person without changing; or by representing the imitators as all active and taking part. So that, though in one respect Homer and Sophocles would go together as imitators, as both having earnest subjects, in another Sophocles and Aristophanes would go together, as both imitating dramatically. . . . Two causes, both of them natural, seem to have operated together to originate the poetic art. The first is, that the tendency to imitate is innate in men from childhood, (the difference between man and other animals being that he is the most imitative of all, acquiring even his first lessons in knowledge through imitation,) and that all take pleasure in imitation. Moreover, in the second place, just as the tendency to imitate is natural to us, so also is the love of melody and of rhythm, and metre is evidently a variety of rhythm. Those, therefore, who from the first were most strongly inclined to these things by nature, proceeding by little and little, originated poetry out of their impromptu fancies. Poetry, thus originated, was broken into departments corresponding to the peculiar characters of its producers; the more serious imitating only beautiful actions and their issues, while the more thoughtless natures imitated mean incidents, inventing lampoons, as others had invented hymns and eulogies. Before Homer we have no poem of any kind to be mentioned; though, doubtless, many existed."

Such, as indicated in those sentences of the treatise which seem to be of most essential import, is the general doctrine of Aristotle as to the nature of Poetry. With this contrast Bacon's theory, as stated, cursorily but profoundly, in the following sentences from the *Advancement of Learning*:—

"The parts of human learning have reference to the three parts of man's understanding, which is the seat of learning. History to his Memory, Poesy to his Imagination, and Philosophy to his Reason. . . . Poesy is a part of learning, in measure of words for the most part restrained, but in all other points extremely licensed, and doth truly refer to the imagination, which, being not tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which Nature hath severed, and sever that which Nature hath joined, and so make unlawful matches and divorces of things. *Pictoribus atque Poëtis, &c.* It Poetry is taken in two senses—in respect of words, or matter. In the first sense, it is but a character of style, and belongeth to the arts of speech, and is not pertinent for the present; in the latter, it is, as hath been said, one of the principal portions of learning, and is nothing else but feigned history, which

may be styled as well in prose as in verse. The use of this feigned history hath been to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man in the points wherein the nature of things doth deny it—the world being in proportion inferior to the soul; by reason whereof there is, agreeable to the spirit of man, a more ample greatness, a more exact goodness, and a more absolute variety than can be found in the nature of things. Therefore, because the acts or events of true history have not that magnitude which satisfieth the mind of man, Poesy feigneth acts and events greater and more heroical; because true history propoundeth the successes and the issues of actions not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore Poesy feigneth them more just in retribution, and more according to revealed Providence; because true history representeth actions and events more ordinary and less interchanged, therefore Poesy endueth them with more rareness, so as it appeareth that Poesy serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and delectation. And, therefore, it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind, whereas Reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things. . . . In this third part of learning, which is Poesy, I can report no deficiency. For, being as a plant that cometh of the lust of the earth without a formal seed, it hath sprung up and spread abroad more than any other kind."

Now, though it would be possible, we doubt not, so to stretch and comment upon Aristotle's theory of poetry as to make it correspond with this of Bacon's, yet, *primâ facie*, the two theories are different, and even antithetical. If both are true, it is because the theorists tilt at opposite sides of the shield. Aristotle makes the essence of poetry to consist in its being imitative and truthful; Bacon, in its being creative and fantastical. According to Aristotle, there is a natural tendency in men to the imitation of what they see in nature; the various arts are nothing more than imitations, so to speak, with different kinds of imitating substance; and poetry is that art which imitates in articulate language, or, at most, in language elevated and rendered more rich and exquisite by the addition of metre. According to Bacon, on the other hand, there is a natural tendency and a natural prerogative in the mind of man, to condition the universe anew for its own intellectual satisfaction; to brood, as it were, over the sea of actual existences, carrying on the work of creation with these existences for the material, and its own phantasies and longings for the informing spirit; to be ever on the wing among nature's sounds and appearances, not merely for the purpose of observing and co-ordinating them, but also that it may delight itself with new ideal combinations, severing what nature has joined, and joining what nature has put asunder. Poetry, in accordance with this view, might perhaps be



defined as the art of producing, by means of articulate language, metrical or unmetrical, a *fictitious concrete*; this being either like to something existing in nature, or, if unlike anything there existing, justifying that unlikeness by the charm of its own impressiveness.

Amid all the discussions of all the critics as to the nature of poetry, this antagonism, if such it is, between the Aristotelian and the Baconian theories, will be found eternally reproducing itself. When Wordsworth defined poetry to be "emotion recollected in tranquillity," and declared it to be the business of the poet to represent out of real life, and as nearly as possible in the language of real life, scenes and events of an affecting or exciting character, he reverted, and with good effect, to the imitation-theory of Aristotle. All Coleridge's disquisitions, on the other hand, even when his friend Wordsworth is the theme and exemplar, are subtle developments of the imagination-theory of Bacon. His famous remark that the true antithesis is not Poetry and Prose, but Poetry and Science, is but another form of Bacon's remark, that whereas it is the part of Reason "to buckle and bow the mind to the nature of things," it is the part of Imagination, as the poetical faculty, "to raise the mind by submitting the shows of things to its desires." And so with the definitions, more or less formal, of other writers. Thus Leigh Hunt:—"Poetry is the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty, and power, embodying and illustrating its conceptions by imagination and fancy, and modulating its language on the principle of variety in uniformity." That this definition, notwithstanding that it is constructed on the principle of omitting nothing that any one would like to see included, is yet essentially a glimpse from the Baconian side of the shield, is obvious from the fact that its author afterwards uses as synonymous with it the abbreviations "Imaginative passion," "Passion for imaginative pleasure."—Lastly, Mr. Dallas, with all his ingenuity, does not really get much farther in the end. Beginning with an expression of dissatisfaction with all existing definitions of poetry, Aristotle's and Bacon's included, as being definitions of the thing not in itself, but in its acci-

dents, he proceeds first, very properly, to make a distinction between poetical feeling, which all men have, and the art of poetical expression, which is the prerogative of those who are called poets. Both are usually included under the term Poetry; but, to avoid confusion, Mr. Dallas proposes to use the general term Poetry for the poetical feeling, and to call the art which caters for that feeling Poesy. Then, taking for his clue the fact that all have agreed that, whatever poetry is, it has *pleasure* for its end, he seeks to work his way to the required definition through a prior analysis of the nature of pleasure. Having, as the result of this analysis, defined pleasure to be "the harmonious and unconscious activity of the soul," he finds his way then clear. For there are various kinds of pleasure, and poetry is one of these—it is "imaginative pleasure;" or, writing the thing more fully out, it is the "imaginative harmonious and unconscious activity of the soul," or that kind of harmonious and unconscious activity of the soul which consists in the exercise of the imagination. Poesy, of course, is the corresponding art, the art of producing what will give imaginative pleasure. Now, with all our respect for the ability with which Mr. Dallas conducts his investigation, and our relish for the many lucid and deep remarks which drop from his pen in the course of it, we must say that, as respects the main matter in discussion, his investigation does not leave us fully satisfied. "Poetry is imaginative pleasure"—very well; but Bacon had said substantially the same thing when he described poetry as a part of learning having reference to the imagination; and Leigh Hunt had, as we have seen, anticipated the exact phrase, defining poetry to be "imaginative passion," and the faculty of the poet to be the faculty of "producing imaginative pleasure." In short, the whole difficulty, the very essence of the question, consists not in the word *pleasure*, but in the word *imaginative*. Had Mr. Dallas bestowed one-half the pains on the illustration of what is meant by imagination, that he has bestowed on the analysis of what is meant by pleasure, he would have done the science of poetry more service. This—the nature of the imaginative faculty—is "the vaporous drop profound that

hangs upon the corner of the moon," and Mr. Dallas has not endeavoured to catch it. His chapter upon the Law of Imagination is one of the most cursory in the book; and the total result, as far as a serviceable definition of poetry is concerned, is that he ends in finding himself in the same hut with Bacon, after having refused its shelter.

The antagonism between the Aristotelian theory, which makes poetry to consist in imitative passion, and the Baconian theory, which makes it to consist in imaginative passion, is curiously reproducing itself at present in the kindred art of painting. Pre-Raphaelitism is in painting very much what the reform led by Wordsworth was in poetical literature. Imitate nature; reproduce her exact and literal forms; do not paint ideal trees or vague recollections of trees, ideal brick-walls or vague recollections of brick-walls, but actual trees and actual brick-walls; dismiss from your minds the trash of Sir Joshua Reynolds about "correcting nature," "improving nature," and the like;—such are the maxims addressed by the Pre-Raphaelites, both with brush and with pen, to their fellow-artists. All this is, we say, a return to the theory of Aristotle, which makes the essence of art to consist in Imitation, and a protest against that of Bacon, which makes the essence of art to consist in Idealization. Poor Sir Joshua Reynolds ought to fall back upon Bacon, so that when he is next attacked for his phrases "improving nature," and the like, the Pre-Raphaelites may see looming behind him the more formidable figure of a man whose words no one dares to call trash, and whose very definition of art was couched in expressions like these:—"There is, agreeable to the spirit of man, a more ample greatness, a more exact goodness, and a more absolute variety than can be found in the nature of things;" "The use of feigned history is to give to the mind of man some shadow of satisfaction in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it." The battle, we say, must be fought with these phrases. Nor is the battle confined to the art of painting. There is a more restricted kind of Pre-Raphaelitism now making its way in the department of fictitious literature. Admiring the reality, the truthfulness of Thackeray's deli-

neations of life and society, there are men who will have nothing to do with what they call the phantasies and caricatures of the Dickens school. The business of the novelist, they say, is to represent men as they are, with all their foibles as well as their virtues; in other words, to imitate real life. Here again comes in the Baconian thunder. "Because the acts or events of true history have not that magnitude which satisfieth the mind of man, poesy (and Bacon's definition of poesy includes the prose fiction) feigneth acts and events greater and more heroical." Whether Dickens can take the benefit of this authority in those cases where he is charged with unreality, we need not inquire; it evidently points, however, to a *possible* style of prose fiction different from that of Fielding and Thackeray, and yet as legitimate in the view of art.

For ourselves, we hold the Imitation theory as applied to poetry or art to be so inadequate in essential respects that it would be time lost to try to mend it; and we find no suitable statement of what seems to us to be the very idea of poetry, except in some definition tantamount to that of Bacon. Only consider the matter for a moment. Take any piece of verse from any poet, and in what single respect can that piece of verse be said to be an imitation of nature? In the first place, that it is verse at all is a huge deviation in itself from what is, in any ordinary sense, natural. Men do not talk in good literary prose, much less in blank verse or rhyme. Macbeth, in his utmost strait and horror—Lear, when the lightnings scathed his white head—did not actually talk in metre. Even Bruce at Bannockburn did not address his army in trochees. Here, then, at the very outset, there is a break-down in the theory of Imitation, or literal truth to nature. And all prose literature shares in this break-down. Not a single personage in Scott's novels would have spoken precisely as Scott makes them speak; nay, nor is there a single character in Thackeray himself strictly and in every respect a fac-simile of what is real. Correct grammar, sentences of varied lengths and of various cadences, much more octosyllabic or pentameter verse, and still more rhymed stanzas, are all artificialities. Literature has them, but in real life they are not to be found.

It is as truly a deviation from nature to represent a king talking in blank verse, or a lover plaining in rhyme, as it is, in an opera, to make a martyr sing a song and be encored before being thrown into the flames. So far as truth to nature is concerned, an opera, or even a ballet, is hardly more artificial than a drama. Supposing, however, that, in order to escape from this difficulty, it should be said that metre, rhyme, rhetorical consecutiveness, and the like, are conditions previously and for other reasons existing in the material in which the imitation is to take place, would the theory of imitation or truth to nature even then hold good? Let it be granted that grammatical and rhythmical prose is, as it were, a kind of marble, that blank verse is, as it were, a kind of jasper, and that rhymed verse is, as it were, a kind of amethyst or opaline; that the selection of these substances as the materials in which the imitation is to be effected is a thing already and independently determined on; and that it is only in so far as imitation can be achieved consistently with the nature of these substances that imitation and art are held to be synonymous. Will the theory even then look the facts in the face? It will not. In the time of Aristotle, indeed, when most Greek poetry was, to a greater degree than poetry is now, either directly descriptive or directly narrative, the theory might have seemed less astray than it must to us. Even then, however, it was necessarily at fault. The Achilles and the Ajax of Homer, the *Œdipus* and the *Antigone* of Sophocles, were, in no sense, imitations from nature; they were ideal beings, never seen on any *Ægean* coast, and dwelling nowhere save in the halls of imagination. Aristotle himself felt this; and hence, at the risk of cracking into pieces his own fundamental theory, he indulges occasionally in a strain like that of Bacon when he maintains that poetry "representeth actions and events less ordinary and interchanged, and endueth them with more rareness," than is found in nature. "The poet's business," says Aristotle, "is not to tell events as they have actually happened, but as they possibly might happen." And again: "Poetry is more philosophical and more sublime than history." Very true, but what then becomes of the imitation? In what possible sense



can there be imitation unless where there is something to be imitated? If that something is ideal, if it exists not actually and outwardly, but only in the mind of the artist, then imitation is the wrong word to use. And all this will be much more obvious if we refer to modern poetry. Here is a stanza from Spenser—part of his description of the access to Mammon's cave. He has just described Revenge, Jealousy, Fear, Shame, and other entities.

“ And over them sad Horror with grim hue  
Did always soar, beating his iron wings ;  
And after him owls and night-ravens flew,  
The hateful messengers of heavy things,  
Of death and dolour telling sad tidings ;  
Whiles sad Celeno, sitting on a clift,  
A song of bale and bitter sorrow sings,  
That heart of flint asunder could have rift ;  
Which having ended, after him she flieth swift.” *F. A. J. V. 23.*

This is true poetry ; and yet, by no possible ingenuity, short of that which identified King Jeremiah with pickled cucumbers, could it be shown to consist of imitation. If it be said that it is mimic creation, and that this is the sense in which Aristotle meant his imitation, or *μιμησις*, to be understood, we shall be very glad to accept the explanation ; but then we shall have to say, in reply, that as the essence of the business lies in the word “ creation ” as the substantive of the phrase, it is a pity the brunt of the disquisition should have been borne so long by the adjective. Aristotle, we believe, did mean that poetry was, in the main, fiction, or invention of fables in imitation of nature ; but, unfortunately, even then he misleads by making imitation, which is but the jackal in the treatise, seem the lion in the definition. Nor even then will his theory be faultless and complete. Spenser's grim-hued Horror soaring aloft, beating his iron wings, and with owls and night-ravens after him, is certainly a creation ; but in what sense it is a *mimic* creation, or a creation in imitation of nature, it would take a critic, lost to all reasonable use of words, to show. In short, and to close this discussion with a phrase which seems to us to fall like a block of stone through all our puny contemporary reasonings about art imitating nature, being true to nature, and the like—“ Art is *called* art,” said Goethe, “ simply because it is *not* nature.” This, it will be seen, is



identical with Bacon's poesy "submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind." Only in one sense can it be said that the art itself comes under the denomination of nature. Thus, Shakespeare—

" E'en that art,  
Which, you say, adds to nature, is an art  
That nature makes "

True, as Goethe would have been the first to admit! In this sense, Spenser's grim-hued Horror beating his iron wings *was* a part of nature, seeing that, in this sense, the poet's own soul, with that very imagination starting out of it, was involved and contained in the universal round. But in any sense in which the words art and nature are available for the purposes of critical exposition, Goethe's saying is irrefragable—" Art is *called* art simply because it is *not* nature." Dissolve the poet through nature, regard the creative act itself as a part of nature, and then, of course, poetry or art is truth to nature; but keep them distinct, as you must do if you talk of imitation, and then the poet is nature's master, changer, tyrant, lover, watcher, slave, and mimic, all in one, his head now low in her lap, and again, a moment after, she scared and weeping, that, though he is with her, he minds her not.

All this, we believe, is very necessary to be said. Pre-Raphaelitism in painting, like Wordsworth's reform in poetical literature, (which reform consisted in the precept and example of what may be called Pre-Drydenism,) we regard, so far as it is a recall of art to truth and observation, as an unmixed good. But it is essentially, in this particular respect, a reform only in the *language* of art; and art itself is not language, but the creative use of it. We think the Pre-Raphaelites know this; for though, in theorizing, they naturally put forward their favourite idea of imitation or truthfulness, yet in their practice they are as much imaginative artists as imitative. Take any of the higher Pre-Raphaelite paintings, and while the *language* of the painting—that is, the flowers, and grasses, and foliage, and brick-walls, and costumes—are more real and true imitations than are to be seen elsewhere, the *thought* which this language is used to convey is at least as ideal, as much a supposition, imagination, or recombination, as much a mere wish or *utinam*,

as in the majority of other pictures. Still, in our theory of art at the present day, or at least in our theory of literary art, the notion of imitation is beginning to exist in excess. The very power of that most admirable novelist, Thackeray, is beginning to spoil us. We will have nothing but reality, nothing but true renderings of men and women as they are; no giants or demigods any more, but persons of ordinary stature, and the black and the white in character so mixed that people shall neither seem crows nor white doves, but all more or less magpies. Good, certainly, all this; but had the rule always been peremptory, as some would now make it, where had been our Achilleses, our Prometheuses, our Tancreds, our Lears, our Hamlets, our Fausts, our Egmonts; these men that never were, these idealizations of what might be—not copied from nature, but imagined and full fashioned by the soul of man, and thence disenchained into nature, magnificent phantasms, to roam amid its vacancies? Nor will it do to exempt the epic and the tragic muses, and to subject to the rule only the muse of prose fiction. Where, in that case, had been our Quixotes, our Pantagruels and Panurges, our Ivanhoes and Rebeccas, our Fixleins and Siebenkaeses? These were sublimations of nature, not imitations; suggestions to history by brain and genius and an inspired philosophy. The muse of prose literature is very hardly dealt with. We see not why, in prose, there should not be much of that mighty licence in the fantastic, that measured riot, that right of whimsy, that unabashed dalliance with the extreme and the beautiful, which the world allows, by prescription, to verse. Why may not one in prose chase forest-nymphs, and see little green-eyed elves, and delight in peonies and musk-roses, and invoke the stars, and roll mists about the hills, and watch the seas thundering through caverns, and dashing against promontories? Why, in prose, quail from the grand or ghastly on the one hand, or blush with shame at too much of the exquisite on the other? Is prose made of iron? Must it never weep, must it never laugh—never linger to look at a buttercup, never ride at a gallop over the downs? Always at a steady trot, transacting only such business as may be done within the limits of a soft

sigh on the one hand, and a thin smile on the other, must it leave all finer and higher work of imagination to the care of sister Verse? Partly so, perhaps; for prose soon gets ashamed of itself, and, when very highly inspired, lifts itself into verse. Yet it is well for literature that we have still such men among us as De Quincey and Christopher North—prose-poets to us, as Richter was to the Germans; men avoiding nothing as too fantastic for their element, but free and daring in it as the verse-poet in his; fronting the grisliest shapes, ascending to the farthest heights, descending to the lowest depths, pursuing the quaintest conceits; all the while, too, such masters of the element itself; now piling sound on sound into a great organ-symphony, now witching, as with harp-music, now letting the sense die away in cadence, like the echoes of a bugle blown among the hills. All honour to Thackeray and the prose-fiction of social reality; but let us not so theorize as to exclude from prose-fiction, when we can get it, the boundless imagination of another Richter, or even the lawless zanyism of another Rabelais.

Poetry, then, we must, after all, define in terms tantamount, or thereabouts, to those of Bacon. With Bacon himself we may define it vaguely as having reference to the imagination, "which faculty submitteth the shows of things to the desires of the mind, whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things." Or we may vary the phrase, and, with Coleridge, call it, "the vision and faculty divine;" or, with Leigh Hunt, "imaginative passion," the passion for "imaginative pleasure;" or, with Mr. Dallas, more analytically, "the imaginative, harmonious, and unconscious activity of the soul." In any case, IMAGINATION is the main word, the main idea. Upon this Shakespeare himself has put his seal.

"The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,  
Are of *imagination* all compact."

In short, poesy is what the Greek language recognised it to be—*ποίησις*, or creation. The antithesis, therefore, is between Poetry and Science—*ποίησις* and *νόησις*. Let the universe of all accumulated existence, inner and outer, material and mental, up to the present moment, lie under one like a sea, and there

are two ways in which it may be intellectually dealt with and brooded over. On the one hand, the intellect of man may brood over it inquiringly, striving to penetrate beneath it, to understand the system of laws by which its multitudinous atoms are held together, to master the mystery of its pulsations and sequences. This is the mood of the man of science. On the other hand, the intellect of man may brood over it creatively, careless how it is held together, or whether it is held together at all, and regarding it only as a great accumulation of material to be submitted farther to the operation of a combining energy, and lashed and beaten up into new existences. This is the mood of the poet. The poet is emphatically the man who continues the work of creation ; who forms, fashions, combines, imagines ; who breathes his own spirit into things ; who conditions the universe anew according to his whim and pleasure ; who bestows heads of brass on men when he likes, and sees beautiful women with arms of azure ; who walks amid Nature's appearances, divorcing them, rematching them, interweaving them, starting at every step, as it were, a flock of white-winged phantasies that fly and flutter into the heaven of the future.

All very well ; but, in plain English, what is meant by this imagination, this creative faculty, which is allowed by all to be the characteristic of the poet ? Mr. Dallas will tell you that psychologists differ in their definitions of imagination. Dugald Stewart, and others, he says, have regarded it solely as the faculty which looks to the possible and unknown, which invents hippogriffs and the like ideal beasts—in short, the creative faculty proper. Mr. Dallas properly maintains that this is not sufficient, and that the faculty unphilosophically called Conception—that is, the faculty which mirrors or reproduces the real—must also be included in the poetic imagination. And this is nearly all that he says on the subject.

Now, if we were to venture on a closer definition, such as might stand its ground, and be found applicable over the whole length and breadth of poetry, we should, perhaps, affirm something to the following effect:—The poetic or imaginative faculty is *the power of intellectually producing a*



*new or artificial concrete*; and the poetic genius or temperament is *that disposition of mind which leads habitually, or by preference, to this kind of intellectual exercise*. There is much in this statement that might need explanation. In the first place, we would call attention to the words "intellectually producing," "intellectual exercise." These words are not needlessly inserted. It seems to us that the distinct recognition of what is implied in these words would save a great deal of confusion. The phrases "poetic fire," "poetic passion," and the like, true and useful as they are on proper occasion, are calculated sometimes to mislead. There is fire, there is passion in the poet; but that which is peculiar in the poet, that which constitutes the poetic tendency as such, is a special *intellectual* habit, distinct from the intellectual habit of the man of science. The poetic process may be set in operation by, and accompanied by, any amount of passion or feeling; but the poetic process itself, so far as such distinctions are of any value, is an *intellectual* process. Farther, as to its kind, it is the intellectual process of producing a new or artificial concrete. This distinguishes poetry at once in all its varieties, and whether in verse or in prose, from the other forms of literature. In scientific or expository literature the tendency is to the abstract, to the translation of the facts and appearances of nature into general intellectual conceptions and forms of language. In oratorical literature, or the literature of moral stimulation, the aim is to urge the mind in a certain direction, or to induce upon it a certain state. There remains, distinct from either of these, the literature of the concrete, the aim of which is to represent the facts and appearances of nature and life, or to form out of them new concrete combinations. There are men who delight in things simply because they have happened, or because they can imagine them to happen—men, for example, to whom it is a real pleasure to know that at such and such a time a knight in armour rode along that way and across that bridge; who have an infinite relish for such a fact as that Sulla had a face mottled white and red, so that an Athenian wit compared it to a mulberry dipped in meal; who can go back to that moment,

ay, and re-arrest time there, as in a picture, when Manlius hung half-way down the Tarpeian rock, and had his death of blood yet beneath him, or when Marie Antoinette lay under the axe, and it had not fallen; men, to whom also the mere embodiments of their own fancy or of the fancy of others are visions they never tire to doat and gaze on. These are the votaries of the concrete. Now, so far as that literature of the concrete whose business it is to gratify such feelings, deals merely with the actual facts of the past as delivered to it by memory, it resolves itself into the department of *history*; while, so far as it remains unexhausted by such a subduction, it is *poetry* or *creative literature*. We speak, of course theoretically; in practice, as all know, the two shade into each other, the historian often requiring and displaying the imagination of the poet, and the poet, on the other hand, often relapsing into the describer and the historian. And here it is that one part of our definition may be found fault with. Seeing that the poet does not necessarily, in every case, invent scenes and incidents totally ideal, but often treats poetically the actual fields and landscapes of the earth and the real incidents of life—seeing, in fact, that much of our best and most genuine poetry is descriptive and historical—why define poesy to be the production of a new or artificial concrete? Why not call it either the reproduction of an old or the production of a new concrete? There is, we believe, no objection to calling it so, except that the division which would be thus established is not fundamental. In every piece of poetry, we believe, even the most descriptive and historical, that which makes it poetical is not the concrete as furnished by sheer recollection, but the concrete as shaped and bodied forth anew by the poet's thought—that is, as, in the strictest sense, factitious and artificial. Shelley, indeed, very sweetly calls poetry “the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds;” but then this only refers us farther back in time for the poetry, which certainly does not consist in the act of recording, if it be only recording, but already lay in the good and happy moments that are recorded. Thus, if it be said that the beautiful passage in Wordsworth



describing a winter landscape, with the lake on which he skated with his companions in his boyhood, is a mere transcript of a scene from recollection, we reply, that, if it be so, (which we do not admit,) then the poetry of the passage was transacted along with the skating, and the critic, instead of watching the man at his writing-table, must keep by the side of the boy on the ice. In short, in every case whatever, poetry is the production of an artificial concrete — artificial either in *toto*, or in so far as it is matter of sense or memory worked into form by the infusion of a meaning. The word artificial, we know, has bad associations connected with it; but, as Hazlitt said of Allegory, the word is really a harmless word, and won't bite you. It is only necessary to see what it means here to invest it with all that is splendid.

The poetical tendency, then, is the tendency to that kind of mental activity which consists in the production, we might almost say secretion, by the mind of an artificial concrete; and the poetic genius is that kind or condition of mind to which this kind of activity is constitutionally most delightful and easy. Of the legitimacy and nobleness of such a mode of activity what need is there to say anything? With some theorists, indeed, poets are little better than privileged liars, and poetry is little better than the art of lying so as to give pleasure. Even Bacon, with his synonyms of "feigned history" and the like, evidently means to insinuate a kind of contempt for poetry as compared with philosophy. The one he calls "the theatre," where it is not good to stay long; the other is the "judicial place or palace of the mind." This is natural enough in a man the tenor of whose own intellectual work must have inclined him, apart even from the original constitutional bias which determined *that*, to prefer the exercise which "buckled and bowed the mind to the nature of things," to the exercise which "elevates the mind by submitting the shows of things to its desires." But recognising, as he did, that the one exercise is, equally with the other, the exercise of a faculty which is part and parcel of the human constitution, he was not the man to go very far with the joke about poets being a species of liars. That, we believe, was Bentham's fun. One

can see what a good thing the old gentleman might have made of it. "Why was that poor fellow transported? Why, the fact is, at last assizes, he originated a piece of new concrete, which the law calls perjury." But the joke may be taken by the other end. When that deity of the Grecian mythology, (if the Grecian mythology had such a deity,) whose function it was to create trees, walked one sultry day over the yet treeless earth, big with unutterable thought, and when, chancing to lie down in a green spot, the creative phrenzy came upon him, his thought rushed forth, and, with a whirr of earthy atoms all round and a tearing of turf, the first of oaks sprang up completed, that also was the origination of a new piece of concrete, but one could hardly say that it was telling a lie. Had his godship been a philosopher instead of a poet—had he buckled and bowed his mind to the nature of things instead of accommodating the shows of things to his desires—the world might have been without oaks to this very day.

Poetical activity being defined generally to be that kind of intellectual activity which results in the production, or, as one might say, deposition by the mind, of new matter of the concrete, it follows that there are as many varieties in the exercise of this activity as there are possible forms of an intellectual concrete. To attempt a complete enumeration of the various ways in which imaginative activity may show itself, would be almost hopeless; an instance or two, however, may bring some of the more common of them before the mind.

"The sun had just sunk below the tops of the mountains, whose long shadows stretched athwart the valley; but his sloping rays, shooting through an opening of the cliffs, touched with a yellow gleam the summits of the forest that hung upon the opposite steeps, and streamed in full splendour upon the towers and battlements of a castle that spread its extensive ramparts along the brow of a precipice above. The splendour of these illuminated objects was heightened by the contrasted shade which involved the valley below."—MRS. RADCLIFFE.

"Almost at the root  
Of that tall pine, the shadow of whose bare  
And slender stem, while here I sit at eve,  
Oft stretches towards me, like a long straight path,  
Traced faintly on the greensward—there, beneath  
A plain blue stone, a gentle dalesman lies."—WORDSWORTH.

These are plain instances of that kind of imaginative exercise which consists in the imagination of *scenes* or *objects*. A large proportion of the imaginative activity of men generally, and of authors in particular, is of this species. It includes pictures and descriptions of all kinds, from the most literal reproductions of the real, whether in country or town, to the most absolute phantasies in form and colour; and from the scale of a single object, such as the moon or a bank of violets, to the scale of a Wordsworthian landscape, or of a Milton's universe with its orbs and interspaces. It may be called descriptive imagination.

"And Priam then alighted from his chariot,  
Leaving Idæus with it, who remained  
Holding the mules and horses; and the old man  
Went straight in doors, where the beloved of Jove  
Achilles sat, and found him In the room  
Were others, but apart; and two alone—  
The hero Automedon and Alcinous,  
A branch of Mars—stood by him They had been  
At meals, and had not yet removed the board.  
Great Priam came, without their seeing him,  
And, kneeling down, he clasped Achilles' knees,  
And kissed those terrible homicidal hands  
Which had deprived him of so many sons."—HOMER.

This is the imagination of *incident*, or narrative imagination. The instance is plain even to baldness—it is direct Homeric narration; but for this very reason it will better stand as a type of that large department of imaginative activity to which it belongs. In this department are included all narrations of incidents, whether historical and real, or fictitious and horribly supernatural; from the scale, too, of the single incident as told in a ballad, or incidentally as a link in a continuous story, up to the sustained unity of the epos or drama, as in *Crusoe*, *Don Quixote*, the *Iliad*, the *Divine Comedy*, the *Fuery Queene*, *Macbeth*, or *Paradise Lost*. It is unnecessary to point out that the narration of incident always involves a certain amount of description of scenery.

"The Reve was a slender colerike man,  
His beard was shave as nigh as ever he can,  
His hair was by his ears round yshorn,  
His top was docked like a priest beforne,  
Full longé were his legges and full lean,  
Ylike a staff, there was no calf yseen."—CHAUCER.

This may stand as a specimen of what is in reality a sub-variety of the imaginative exercise first mentioned, but is important enough to be adverted to apart. It may be called the imagination of *physiognomy* and *costume*, under which head might be collected an immense number of passages from all quarters of our literature. This department, too, will include both the real and ideal—the real, as in Chaucer's and Scott's portraits of men and women; the ideal, as in Spenser's personifications, in Ariosto's hippogriff, or in Dante's Nimrod in a pit in hell, with his face as large as the dome of St. Peter's, and his body in proportion, blowing a horn, and yelling gibberish. Connected with this in practice, but distinguishable from it, is another variety of imaginative exercise, which may be called the imagination of *states of feeling*. Here is an example:—

“A fig for those by law protected!  
 Liberty's a glorious feast;  
 Courts for cowards were erected;  
 Churches built to please the priest.”  
BURNS'S *Jolly Beggars*.

This stanza, it will be observed—and we have chosen it on purpose—is, in itself, as little poetical as may be; it is mere harsh Chartist prose. But in so far as it is an imagined piece of concrete—that is, in so far as it is an imagination by the poet of the state of feeling of another mind, or of his own mind in certain circumstances—it is poetical. This is an important consideration, for it links the poet not only with what is poetical in itself, but with a whole, much bigger, world of what is unpoetical in itself. The poet may imagine opinions, doctrines, heresies, cogitations, debates, expositions—there is no limit to his traffic with the moral any more than with the sensuous appearances of the universe; only, as a poet, he deals with all these as concrete things, existing in the objective air, and from which his own soul stands royally disentangled, as a spade stands loose from the sand it digs, whether it be sand of gold or sand of silex. The moment any of the doctrines he is dealing with melts subjectively into his own personal state of being (which is necessarily and nobly happening continually,) at that moment the



poet ceases to be a poet pure, and becomes so far a thinker or moralist in union with the poet. As regards the literary range of this kind of imaginative exercise,—the imagination of states of feeling,—it is only necessary to remember what a large proportion it includes of our lyric poetry, and how far it extends itself into the epic and the drama, where (and especially in the drama) it forms, together with the imagination of costume, the greater part of what is called the invention of *character*.

The foregoing is but a slight enumeration of some of the various modes of imaginative exercise as they are popularly distinguishable; and, in transferring them into creative literature at large, they must be conceived as incessantly interblended, and as existing in all varieties and degrees of association with personal thought, personal purpose, and personal calm or storm of feeling. It is matter of common observation, however, that some writers excel more in one and some more in another of the kinds of imagination enumerated. One writer is said to excel in descriptions, but to be deficient in plot and incident; nay, to excel in that kind of description which consists in the imagination of form, but to be deficient in that which consists in the imagination of colour. Another is said to excel in plot, but to be poor in the invention of character, and in other particulars. In short, the imagination, though in one sense it acts loose and apart from the personality, flying freely round and round it, like a sea-bird round a rock, seems, in a deeper sense, restricted by the same law as the personality in its choice and apprehension of the concrete. The organ of ideality, as the phrenologist would say, is the organ by which man freely bodies forth an ideal objective, and yet, let ideality bulge out in a man's head as big as an egg, it is of no use applying it, with Keats or Milton, in the direction of white pinks, pansies freaked with jet, sapphire battlements, and crimson-lipped shells, unless there is a little knot on the eyebrow over the organ of colour.

The poetical tendency of the human mind being this tendency to the ideal concrete—to the imagination of scenes,

incidents, physiognomies, states of feeling, and so on ; and all men having more or less of this tendency, catering for them in the ideal concrete, very much in the same way, and to the same effect, as their senses cater for them in the real (so that the imagination of a man might be said to be nothing more than the ghosts of his senses wandering in an unseen world), it follows that the poet, *par excellence*, is simply the man whose intellectual activity is consumed in this kind of exercise. All men have imagination ; but the poet is “ of imagination all compact.” He lives and moves in the ideal concrete. He teems with imaginations of forms, colours, incidents, physiognomies, feelings, and characters. The ghosts of his senses are as busy in an unseen world of sky, and cloud, and sea, and vegetation, and cities, and highways, and thronged markets of men, and mysterious beings, belonging even to the horizon of *that* existence, as his real senses are with all the nearer world of nature and life. But the notable peculiarity lies in this, that every thought of his in the interest of *this* world is an excursion into *that*. In this respect the theory which has been applied to the exposition of the Grecian mythology, applies equally to poetic genius in general. The essence of the mythical process, it is said, lay in this, that the early children of the earth having no abstract language, every thought of theirs, of whatever kind, and about whatever matter, was necessarily a new act of imagination, a new excursion in the ideal concrete. If they thought of the wind, they did not think of a fluid rushing about, but of a deity blowing from a cave ; if they thought of virtue rewarded, they saw the idea in the shape of a visible transaction, in some lone place, between beings human and divine. And so, allowing for a certain obvious amount of difference, with the poetical mode of thought to this day. Every thought of the poet, about whatever subject, is transacted not only in propositional language, but for the most part in a kind of phantasmagoric, or representative language of imaginary scenes, objects, incidents, and circumstances. To clothe his feelings with *circumstance* ; to weave forth whatever arises in his mind into



an objective tissue of imagery and incident that shall substantiate it and make it visible; such is the constant aim and art of the poet. Take an example. The idea of life occurs to the poet Keats, and how does he express it?

"Stop and consider! Life is but a day;  
A fragile dew drop on its perilous way  
From a tree's summit, a poor Indian's sleep,  
While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep  
Of Montmorenci. Why so sad a moan?  
Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown;  
The reading of an ever-changing tale;  
The light uplifting of a maiden's veil;  
A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air;  
A laughing school boy, without grief or care,  
Riding the springy branches of an elm."

This is true *ποίησις*. What with the power of innate analogy, what with the occult suasion of the rhyme, there arose first in the poet's mind, contemporaneous with the idea of life, nay, as incorporate with that idea, the imaginary object or vision of the dew-drop falling through foliage—that imagined circumstance is, therefore, flung forth as representative of the idea. But even this does not exhaust the creative force; the idea bodies itself again in the new imaginary circumstance of the Indian in his boat; and that, too, is flung forth. Then there is a rest; but the idea still buds, still seeks to express itself in new circumstance, and five other translations of it follow. And these seven pictures, these seven morsels of imagined concrete, supposing them all to be intellectually genuine, are as truly the poet's *thoughts* about life as any seven scientific definitions would be the thoughts of the physiologist or the metaphysician. And so in other instances. Tennyson's *Vision of Sin* is a continued phantasmagory of scene and incident representative of a meaning; and if the meaning is not plain throughout, it is because it would be impossible for the poet himself to translate every portion of it out of that language of phantasmagory in which alone it came into existence. Again, Spenser's personifications—his grim-hued Horror soaring on iron wings, his Jealousy sitting alone biting his lips, and the like—are all thoughts expressed in circumstance, the circumstance in this case being that of costume and physiognomy. So, too, with

such splendid personifications as those of De Quincey—the eldest and the youngest of the Ladies of Sorrow; the one, the Lady of Tears, with eyes sweet and subtle, wild and sleepy by turns, a diadem on her head, and keys at her girdle; the other, the Lady of Darkness, her head turreted like Cybele, rising almost beyond the reach of sight, the blazing misery of her eyes concealed by a treble veil of crape. In short, every thought of the poet is an imagination of concrete circumstance of some kind or other—circumstance of visual scenery, of incident, of physiognomy, of feeling, or of character. The poet's thought, let the subject be what it may, brings him to

“Visions of all places : a bowery nook  
Will be elysium—an eternal book  
Whence he may copy many a lovely saying  
About the leaves and flowers—about the playing  
Of nymphs in woods and fountains, and the shade  
Keeping a silence round a sleeping maid ;  
And many a verse from so strange influence,  
That we must ever wonder how and whence  
It came ;”

this occultness arising from the inscrutability of the law which connects one concrete phantasy of the dreaming mind with another. Regarding the poet, then, considered in his nature, we may sum up by saying, that the act of cogitation with him is nothing else than the *intellectual secretion of fictitious circumstance*—the nature of the circumstance in each case depending on the operation of those mysterious affinities which relate thought to the world of sense. In regarding the poet more expressly as a literary artist, all that we have to do is to vary the phrase, and say—the intellectual *invention* of fictitious circumstance. This will apply to all that is truly poetical in literature, whether on the large scale or on the small. In every case what is poetical in literature consists of the embodiment of some notion or feeling, or some aggregate of notions and feelings, in appropriate imagined circumstances. Thus, in historical or biographical writing, the poetic faculty is shown by the skill, sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious, with which the figures are not only portrayed in themselves, but set against imagined visible back-grounds,

and made to move amid circumstances having a pre-arranged harmony with what they do. The achievement of this, in consistency with the truth of record, is the highest triumph of the descriptive historian. In fictitious prose-narrative the same poetic art has still freer scope. That a lover should be leaning over a stile at one moment, and sitting under a tree at another; that it should be clear, pure moonlight when Henry is happy, and that the moon should be bowling through clouds, and a dog be heard howling at a farmhouse near, when the same Henry means to commit suicide—are artifices of which every ordinary novelist is master who knows his trade. The giant Grangousier, in Rabelais, sitting by the fire, very intent upon the broiling of some chesnuts, drawing scratches on the hearth with the end of a burnt stick, and telling to his wife and children pleasant stories of the days of old, is an instance of a higher kind, paralleled by many in Scott and Cervantes. And, then, in the epic and the drama! Hamlet with the skull in his hand, and Homer's heroes *βη-ing* by the *πολυφλοισβοιο*! It is the same throughout the whole literature of fiction—always thought expressed and thrown off in the language of representative circumstance. Indeed, Goethe's theory of poetical or creative literature was, that it is nothing else than the moods of its practitioners objectivized as they rise. A man feels himself oppressed and agitated by feelings and longings, now of one kind, now of another, that have gathered upon him till they have assumed the form of a definite moral uneasiness; if he is not a literary man, he must contrive to work off the load, in some way or other, by the ordinary activity of life—which, indeed, is the great preventive established by nature; if he is a literary man, then the uneasiness is but the motive to creation, and the result is—a song, a drama, an epic, or a novel. Scheming out some plan or story, which is in itself a sort of allegory of his mood as a whole, he fills up the sketch with minor incidents, scenes, and characters, which are nothing more, as it were, than the breaking up of the mood into its minutiae, and the elaboration of these minutiae, one by one, into the concrete. This done, the mood has passed into the objective;

it may be looked at as something external to the mind, which is therefore from that moment rid of it, and ready for another. Such, at least, was Goethe's theory, which, he said, would apply most rigidly to all that he had himself written. Nor would it be difficult, with due explanation, to apply the theory to the works of all the other masters of creative or poetical literature—Homer, Dante, Cervantes, Scott, and Shakespeare. Dante may be said to have slowly translated his whole life into one representative performance.

Several supplementary considerations must be now adduced. The form of the poet's cogitation, we have said, is the evolution not of *abstract propositions* but of *representative concrete circumstances*. But in this, too, there may be degrees of better and worse, of greater and less. Precisely as, of two writers thinking in the language of abstract speculation, we can say, without hesitation, which has the more powerful mind; so of two writers thinking in the other language of concrete circumstance, one may be evidently superior to the other. There is room, in short, for all varieties of greater and less among poets as among other people; there may be poets who are giants, and there may be poets who are pigmies. Hence the folly of the attempts to exalt the poetical genius, merely as such, above other kinds of intellectual manifestation. A man may be constitutionally formed so that he thinks his thoughts in the language of concrete circumstance; and still his thoughts may be very little thoughts, hardly worth having in any language. Both poets and men of science must be tried among their peers. Whether there is a common measure, and what it is; whether there is an intrinsic superiority in the mode of cogitation of the poet over that of the philosopher, or the reverse; and whether and how far we may then institute a comparison of absolute greatness between Aristotle and Homer, between Milton and Kant—are questions of a higher calculus, which most men may leave alone. There is no difficulty, however, when the question is between a Kirke White and a Kant; and when a poor poet, ever so genuine in a small way, intrudes himself on the Exchange of the general world,

telling people there that his intellect is "genius," and that theirs is "talent," he evidently runs a risk of being very unceremoniously treated.

"This palace standeth in the air,  
By necromancy placèd there,  
That it no tempest needs to fear,  
Which way soe'er it blow it :  
And somewhat southward tow'rd the noon  
There lies a way up to the moon,  
And thence the fairy can as soon  
Pass to the Earth below it."

This is very sweet, and nice, and poetical (it is by Drayton; *not* a small poet, but a considerable one); and yet there needs be no great hesitation in saying that, call it genius or what we will, there was less commotion of the elements when it was produced than when Newton excogitated his theory of the Law of Gravitation.

But, to pass to another point. The imagination, as we have already said, following the law of the personality, some imaginations are strong where others are weak, and weak where others are strong. In other words, though all poets, as such, express themselves in the language of concrete circumstance, some are greater adepts in one kind of circumstance, others in another. Some are great in the circumstance of form, which is the sculptor's favourite circumstance; others can produce admirable compositions in *chiaroscuro*; others, again, have the whole rainbow on their pallet. And so, some express themselves better in incident, others better in physiognomy and character. All this is recognised in daily criticism. Now, the consequence of the diversity is, that it is very difficult to compare poets even amongst themselves. It is not every poet, that, like Shakespeare, exhibits an imagination that is absolutely or all but absolutely universal, using with equal ease the language of form, of colour, of character, and of incident. Shakespeare himself, if we may infer anything from his minor poems, and from the carelessness with which he took ready-made plots for his dramas from any quarter (in which, however, there may be a philosophy), was not so great a master of incident as of other kinds of circumstance, and could hardly have rivalled Homer, or



Scott, purely as a narrative poet. How, then, establish a comparative measure, assigning a relative value to each kind of circumstance? How balance what Chaucer has and has not, against what Milton has and has not—Chaucer so skilful in physiognomy, against Milton who has so little of it, but who has so much else; or how estimate the *chiaroscuro* of Byron as against the richly coloured vegetation of Keats? Here, too, a scientific rule is undiscoverable, and a judgment is only possible in very decided cases, or by the peremptory verdict of private taste.

“Many a night I saw the Pleiads, rising thro’ the mellow shade,  
Glitter like a swarm of fire-flies tangled in a silver braid.”

Who will venture to institute a sure comparison of merit between this exquisite bit of colour from Tennyson, and the following simple narrative lines from the same poet?—

“And all the man was broken with remorse;  
And all his love came back a hundredfold;  
And for three hours he sobbed o’er William’s child,  
Thinking of William.”

There is yet a *third* thing that has to be taken into consideration. Be a man as truly a poet as it is possible to be, and be the kind of circumstance in which his imagination excels as accurately known as possible, it is not always that he can do his best. The poet, like other men, is subject to inequalities of mood and feeling. Now he is excited and perturbed, because the occasion is one to rouse his being from its depths; now he is placid, calm, and, as one might say, commonplace. Hence variations in the interest of the poetical efforts of one and the same poet. As he cannot choose but think poetically, whether roused or not, even the leisurely babble of his poorest hours, if he chooses to put it forth, will be sweet and poetical. But he is not to be measured by this, any more than the philosopher by his casual trifles, or the orator by his speeches on questions that are insignificant. Nay, more than this, it is important to remark that it is only at a certain pitch of feeling that some men become poets. For, though the essence of poetry consists, as we have said, in a particular mode of *intellectual* exercise, yet the emotional



moment at which different minds adopt this mode of exercise may not be the same. The language of concrete circumstance is natural to *all* men when they are very highly excited: all joy, all sorrow, all rage, expresses itself in vivid imaginations. The question then not unfrequently ought to be, At what level of feeling a man is or professes to be a poet? On this may depend, not your verdict as to the genuineness of his poetry, but your disposition to spare time to listen to it. The most assiduous members of Parliament do not feel bound to be in the House even when a leader is speaking, unless it is on a Cabinet question or a question of some considerable interest. Some orators know this and reserve themselves; others, delighting in their profession, speak on every question. It is the same with poets, and with the same result. A Keats, though always poetical, may often be poetical with so small a stimulus, that only lovers of poetry for its own sake feel themselves sufficiently interested. Why are Milton's minor poems, exquisite as they are, not cited as measures of the magnitude of his genius? Because they are not his speeches on Cabinet questions. Why is Spenser the favourite poet of poets, rather than a popular favourite like Byron? For the same reason that a Court is crowded during a trial for life or death, but attended only by barristers during the trial of an intricate civil case. The subject chosen by a poetical writer, we have already said, is a kind of allegory of the whole state of his mental being at the moment; but some writers are not moved to allegorize so easily as others, and it is a question with readers what states of being they care most to see allegorized. This, then, is to be taken into account, in comparing poet with poet. Precisely as an orator is remembered by his speeches on great questions, and as the position of a painter among painters is determined in part by the interest of his subjects, so, in a comparison of poets together, or of the same poet with himself, the earnestness of the occasion always goes for something. Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, exquisite as a poetical study, does not bear one down with the same human interest as his plays; and there is a mighty gradation of interest in advancing from leisurely compositions of the

sweet sensuous order, such as Keats's *Endymion* and Spenser's *Faëry Queene*, to the stern and severe splendour of a *Divina Commedia* or a *Prometheus Vincetus*. True, on the one hand, poets choose their own subjects, so that these themselves are to be taken into the estimate; and, on the other, the very practice of the art of poetical expression on any subject, like the glow of the orator when he begins to speak, leads on and on to unexpected regions. Yet, after all, in weighing a poem against others, so as to pronounce a judgment as to relative greatness, this consideration of the emotional level at which it was produced, and of its interest in connexion with the general work and sentiment of the world, is a source of much perplexity.

“ Sweet bird, that shunn’st the noise of folly,  
Most musical, most melancholy !  
Thee, chantress, oft the woods among  
I woo, to hear thy even-song ;  
And, missing thee, I walk unseen  
On the dry, smooth-shaven green,  
To behold the wandering moon  
Riding near her highest noon,  
Like one that hath been led astray  
Through the heaven’s wide pathless way,  
And oft, as if her head she bow’d,  
Stooping through a fleecy cloud.  
Oft, on a plat of rising ground,  
I hear the far-off curfew sound,  
Over some wide-watered shore,  
Swinging slow with sullen roar.”

How decide between this from Milton's *Penseroso*, and this, in so different a key, from Shakespeare's *Lear* ?—

“ Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks ! rage ! blow !  
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout  
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks !  
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,  
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,  
Singe my white head ! and thou all-shaking thunder,  
Strike flat the thick rotundity o’ the world.”

A *fourth* consideration, which intrudes itself into the question of our appreciation of actual poetry, and which is not sufficiently borne in mind, is, that in almost every poem there is much present besides the pure poetry. Poetry, as such, is cogitation in the language of concrete circumstance. Some poets excel constitutionally in one kind of circumstance, some in another; some are moved to this mode of cogitation on

a less, others on a greater emotional occasion; but, over and above all this, it is to be noted that no poet always and invariably cogitates in the poetical manner. Speculation, information, mental produce and mental activity of all kinds, may be exhibited in the course of a work which is properly called a poem on account of its general character; and, as men are liable to be impressed by greatness in every form wherever they meet it, all that is thus precious in the extra-poetical contents of a poem, is included in the estimate of the greatness of the poet. One example will suffice. Shakespeare is as astonishing for the exuberance of his genius in abstract generalization, and for the depth of his analytic and philosophic insight, as for the scope and minuteness of his poetic imagination. It is as if into a mind poetical in *form*, there had been poured also all the *matter* that existed in the mind of his contemporary Bacon. In Shakespeare's plays we have thought, history, exposition, and philosophy, all within the round of the poet. The only difference between him and Bacon sometimes is, that Bacon writes an essay and calls it his own, and that Shakespeare writes a similar essay, and puts it into the mouth of a Ulysses or a Polonius. It is only this fiction of a speaker and an audience, together with the circumstance of the verse, that retains many of Shakespeare's noblest passages within the pale of strict poetry.

Hitherto, it will be observed, we have made no formal distinction between the poet, specifically so called, and the general practitioners of creative literature, of whatever species. Our examples, indeed, have been taken in the main from those whom the world recognises as poets; but, as far as our remarks have gone, poetry still stands synonymous with the whole literature of imagination. All who express their meaning, and impress it upon the world, by the literary representation of scenes, incidents, physiognomies, and characters, whether suggested by the real world or wholly imaginary, are poets. All who, doing this, do it grandly, and manifest a rich and powerful nature, are great poets. Those who excel more in the language of one kind of circumstance, are poets more especially of that kind of

circumstance — poets of visual scenery, poets of incident and narration, poets of physiognomy, or poets of character and sentiment, as the case may be. Those who are poetical only at a high key, and in the contemplation of themes of large human interest, are the poets who take the deepest hold on the memory of the human race. Finally, those who, having the largest amount of poetic genius, and of the best kind, associate therewith the most extensive array of other intellectual qualities, are the men who, even as poets, give their poems the greatest impetus and the greatest universal chance.

Not a word in all this, however, to exclude imaginative prose-writers. So far, the Homers, the Platos, the Sophocleses, the Aristophaneses, the Virgils, the Dantes, the Boccaccios, the Chaucers, the Cervanteses, the Spensers, the Shakespeares, the Miltons, the Tassos, the Molières, the Goethes, the Richters, the Scotts, the Defoes, of the world are all huddled together, the principal figures of a great crowd, including alike poets and prose-writers. These indeed may, in accordance with considerations already suggested, be distributed into groups, and that either by reference to degree or by reference to kind. But no considerations have yet been adduced that would separate the imaginative prose-writers, as such — the Boccaccios, the Cervanteses, the Richters, the Scotts, the Defoes, and the De Quinceys — from the imaginative verse-writers, as such. Now, though this is good provisionally; though it is well to keep together for a while in the same field of view all writers of imagination, whether bards or prose-writers; and though, as we have already said, there is no reason why imagination in prose should not be allowed to do all it can do, and why prose-writers like Richter and De Quincey should not be crowned with poetic laurel; yet the universal instinct of men, not to say also the prejudice of association and custom, demands that the poets, as a sect or brotherhood, shall be more accurately defined. How, then, lead out the poets, in the supreme sense, from the general throng where they yet stand waiting? By what device call the poets by themselves into the foreground, and leave the

prose-writers behind? By a union of two devices! Go in front of the general crowd, you two; you, flag-bearer, with your richly-painted flag, and you, fluter, with your silver flute! Flap the flag, and let them see it; sound the flute, and let them hear it! Lo! already the crowd wavers; it sways to and fro; some figures seem to be pressing forward from the midst, and at last one silver-headed old serjeant steps out in front of all, and begins to march to the sound of the flute. Who is it but old Homer? He is blind, and cannot see the flag, but he knows it is there, and the flute guides him. Others and others follow the patriarch, whom they never deserted yet, some looking to the flag, and others listening to the flute, but all marching in one direction. Shakespeare comes with the rest, stepping lightly, as if but half in earnest. And thus at last, lured by the flag and by the flute, all the poets are brought out into the foreground. The flag is *Imagery*; the flute is *Verse*. In other words, poets proper are distinguished from the general crowd of imaginative writers by a peculiar richness of language, which is called imagery, and by the use, along with that language, of a measured arrangement of words known as verse.

It is, as Mr. Dallas observes, a moot point whether Imagery or Verse is to be regarded as the more essential element of poetry. It has been usual, of late, to give the palm to imagery. Thus, it was a remark of Lord Jeffrey—and the remark has almost passed into a proverb—that a want of relish for such rich sensuous poetry as that of Keats would argue a want of true poetical taste. The same would probably be said of Spenser. Mr. Dallas, on the other hand, thinks Verse more essential than Imagery, and in this Leigh Hunt would probably agree with him. The importance attached to a sensuous richness of language as part of poetry is, Mr. Dallas thinks, too great at present; and in opposition to Lord Jeffrey, or at least by way of corrective to his remark about Keats, he proposes that a power of appreciating such severe literary beauty as that of Sophocles, shall, more than anything else, be reckoned to the credit of a man's poetical taste. We think Mr. Dallas, on the whole, is in the right;



and this will appear more clearly if we consider briefly what Imagery and Verse respectively are, in their relation to poetry.

Imagery in poetry is essentially this—secondary concrete adduced by the imagination in the expression of prior concrete. Thus, in the *simile*,—

“The superior Fiend  
Was moving toward the shore, his ponderous shield  
Behind him cast; the broad circumference  
Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb  
Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views  
At evening from the top of Fesole.”

Here the primary circumstance in the imagination of the poet is Satan, with his shield hung round his shoulders. While imagining this, however, the poet, moving at ease in the whole world of concrete things, strikes upon a totally distinct visual appearance, that of the moon seen through a telescope; and his imagination, enamoured with the likeness, cannot resist imparting the new picture to the reader as something auxiliary and additional to the first. Again, take the *metaphor*:—

“Sky lowered, and, muttering thunder, some sad drops  
Wept at completing of the mortal sin  
Original.”

Here the process is the same as in the simile, but more unconscious and complete. The concrete circumstance first in the mind (so far at least as these lines are concerned) is the sky dropping rain; in the imagination of this circumstance, another imagined circumstance, that of a being shedding tears, intrudes itself; the two circumstances, so like to the mind that it hardly is conscious that they are two, are combined by a kind of identifying flash; and the rich double concrete is presented to the reader. So essentially with that highest species of metaphor, the *personification* or *vivification* (of which, indeed, the metaphor quoted is an example), the speciality of which consists in this, that a piece of concrete taken from the inanimate world is wedded to a piece of concrete taken from the world of life. The two worlds lying as it were side by side in the human imagination as the two halves of all being, this kind of metaphor is the most natural



and the most frequent of all; and powerful imaginations are exceedingly prone to it. A subvariety, to which some writers are much addicted, is the identification of brute with human circumstance, as witness Dickens's dogs and ponies.

Almost all so-called images may be reduced under one or other of the foregoing heads; and, in any case, all imagery will be found to consist in the use of concrete to help out concrete—in the impinging of the mind, so to speak, while dealing with one concrete circumstance against other and other concrete circumstances. Now, as the very essence of the poet consists in the incessant imagination of concrete circumstance, a language rich in imagery is in itself a proof of the possession of poetical faculty in a high degree. *Ceteris paribus*, that is, where there is an equal amount of imagination and of the same quality, in the bodying forth of the main circumstance of a poem or a poetical passage—whether that is a circumstance of visible scenery, of incident, of physiognomy, or of mental state—the more of subsidiary circumstance evolved in intellectual connexion with the main one the higher the evidence of poetical power. There is an analogy, in this respect, between poetical and scientific writers. Some scientific writers, as, for example, Locke, attend so rigorously to the main thought they are pursuing as to give to their style a kind of nakedness and iron straightness; others, as, for example, Bacon, without being indifferent to the main thought, are so full of intellectual matter of all kinds that they enrich every sentence with a *detritus* of smaller propositions related to the one immediately on hand. So with poets. Some poets—as Keats, Shakespeare, and Milton in much of his poetry—so teem with accumulated concrete circumstance, or generate it so fast, as their imagination works, that every imagined circumstance as it is put forth from them takes with it an accompaniment of parasitic fancies. Others, as the Greek dramatists and Dante, sculpture their thoughts roundly and massively in severe outline. It seems probable that the tendency to excess of imagery is natural to the Gothic or Romantic as distinct from the Hellenic or Classical imagination; but it is not unlikely that the fact that poetry is now read instead of

being merely heard, as it once was, has something to do with it. As regards the question *when* imagery is excessive, *when* the richness of a poet's language is to be called extravagance, no general principle can be laid down. The judgment on this point in each case must depend on the particular state of the case. A useful distinction, under this head, might possibly be drawn between the liberty of the poet and the duty of the artist. Keats's *Endymion*, one might safely, in reference to such a distinction, pronounce to be too rich; for in that poem there is no proportion between the imagery, or accessory concrete, and the main stem of the imagined circumstance from which the poem derives its name. In the *Eve of St. Agnes*, on the other hand, there is no such fault.

Of verse, as connected with poetry, various theories have been given. Wordsworth, whose theory is always more narrow than his practice, makes the *rationale* of verse to consist in this, that it provides for the mind a succession of minute pleasurable surprises in addition to the mere pleasure communicated by the meaning. Others regard the use of verse as consisting in its power to secure the attention of the reader or hearer. Others regard it as a voluntary homage of the mind to law as law, repaid by the usual rewards of disinterested obedience. Mr. Dallas sets these and other theories aside, and puts the matter on its right basis. Verse *is* an artificial source of pleasure; it *is* an incentive to attention, or a device for economizing attention; and it *is* an act of obedience to law if you choose so to regard it. All these, however, are merely statements respecting verse as something already found out and existing; not one of them is a theory of verse in its origin and nature. Such a theory, if it is to be sought for at all, must clearly consist in the assertion of this, as a fundamental fact of nature—that, when the mind of man is either excited to a certain pitch, or engaged in a certain kind of exercise, its transactions adjust themselves, in a more express manner than usual, to time as meted out in beats or intervals. Mr. Dallas, giving to the statement its most transcendental form, says that the *rationale* of metre is to be deduced from the fact that Time being, according to Kant, but a leading

form of sense, must fall under the law of imagination, the faculty representative of sense. Quite independent of this philosophic generalization, which it would at least require much time to work down for the ordinary market, there are many facts, some of which Mr. Dallas very acutely points out, all tending to indicate the existence of such a law as we have referred to. The swinging of a student to and fro in his chair during a fit of cogitation, the oratorical see-saw, the evident connexion of mental states with the breathings and the pulse-beats, the power of the tick-tick of a clock to induce reverie, and of the clinkum-clankum of a bell to make the fool think words to it, are all instances of the existence of such a law. Nay, the beginnings of poetical metre itself are to be traced in speech far on this side of what is accounted poetry. There is a visible tendency to metre in every articulate expression of strong feeling; and the ancient Greeks, we are told, used to amuse themselves with scanning passages in the speeches of their great orators. Without trying to investigate this point farther, however, we would simply refer to a consideration connected with it, which seems important for our present purpose. The law, as stated hypothetically, is, that the mind, *either* when excited to a certain pitch, *or* when engaged in a particular kind of exercise, takes on, in its transactions, a marked concordance with time as measured by beats. Now, whether is it the first or the second mental condition that necessitates this concordance? Poetry we have all along defined as a special mode of *intellectual* exercise, possible under all degrees of emotional excitement—the exercise of the mind *imaginatively*, or in the figuring forth of concrete circumstance. Is it, then, poetry, as such, that requires metre, or only poetry by virtue of the emotion with which it is in general accompanied, that emotion either preceding and stimulating the imaginative action, or being generated by it, as heat is evolved by friction? The question is not an easy one. On the whole, however, we incline to the belief that, though poetry and passion, like two inseparable friends that have taken up house together, have metre for their common servant, it is on passion, and not on poetry, that metre holds

by original tenure. The very reasons we adduce for thinking so will show that the question is not a mere metaphysical quibble. These are—that metre is found, in its highest and most decided form, in lyrical poetry, or the poetry of feeling, narrative poetry having less, and dramatic poetry still less of it; and that, wherever, in the course of a poem, there is an unusual metrical boom and vigour, the passage so characterized will be found to be one not so much of pure concrete richness, as of strong accompanying passion. What, then, if song, instead of being, as common language makes it, the complete and developed form of poetry, should have to be philosophically defined as the complete and developed form of oratory, passing into poetry only in as far as passion, in its utterance, always seizes and whirls with it shreds and atoms of imagined circumstance? If this is the true theory, verse belongs, by historical origin, to oratory, and lingers with poetry only as an entailed inheritance. Prose, then, *may*, as we have said, make inroads upon that region of the literature of the concrete which has hitherto been under the dominion of verse. But, on the other hand, verse, whatever it may have been in its origin, exists now, like many other sovereignties, by right of expediency, constitutional guarantee, and the voluntary submission of those who are its subjects. And here it is that the theories of Wordsworth and others have their proper place. They are theories of verse, not in its origin, but in its character as an existing institution in the literature of the concrete. They tell us what we can now do intellectually by means of verse, which we could not do if her royalty were abolished. They point to the fact, that in literature, as in other departments of activity, law and order, and even the etiquette of exquisite artificial ceremonial, though they may impose intolerable burdens on the disaffected and the boorish, are but conditions of liberty and development to all higher, and finer, and more cultured natures. In short, (and this is the important fact,) metre, rhyme, and the like, are not only devices for the sweet and pleasurable conveyance of the poet's meaning after it is formed; they are devices assisting beforehand in the creation of that meaning—devices so spurring and delighting the



imagination, while they chafe and restrain it, that its thoughts and combinations in the world of concrete circumstance are more rich, more rare, more occult, more beautiful, and more incomprehensible, than they would otherwise be. Like the effect of the music on the fountain and the company of Bacchanals in Tennyson's strange vision, is the effect of verse on poetical thought.

"Then methought I heard a mellow sound,  
Gathering up from all the lower ground;  
Narrowing in to where they sat assembled,  
Low, voluptuous music winding trembled,  
Wov'n in circles they that heard it sigh'd,  
Panted hand in hand with faces pale,  
Swung themselves, and in low tones replied,  
Till the fountain spouted, showering wide  
Sleet of diamond drift and pearly hail."

But here we must stop our discussions on the Theory of Poetry. For much that we have left undiscussed, and especially for a philosophical division of poetry according to its kinds, we must refer to Mr. Dallas. We recommend his book highly and cordially. There is perhaps a stronger dash of what may be called Okenism in his style of speculation, than some readers may like; as, for example, in his systematic laying out of everything into corresponding threes or triads. Thus, poetry figures throughout his treatise as a compound result of three laws—the law of unconsciousness, the law of harmony, and the law of imagination; which laws are supreme respectively in three kinds of poetry—lyrical poetry, epic poetry, and dramatic poetry; which three kinds of poetry, again, correspond historically with Eastern, primitive, or divine art, Grecian, antique, or classical art, and Western, modern, or romantic art; which historical division, again, corresponds philosophically with such trinities as these—I, he, you; time future, time past, time present; immortality, God, freedom; the good, the true, the beautiful. All this, stated thus abruptly and without explanation, may seem more hopeless sort of matter to some than it would to us; but even they will find in the book much that will please them, in the shape of shrewd observation, and lucid and deep criticism, valuable on its own account, and very different from what used to be supplied to the last age by *its* critics.

## PROSE AND VERSE DE QUINCEY.\*

IN the Preface to this series of volumes (which is intended to be a more perfect accomplishment, under the author's own editorship, of a scheme of literary collection already executed very creditably by an American publisher), Mr. De Quincey ventures on something rather unusual—a theoretical classification of his own writings for the benefit of critics. The following is the passage in which he states this classification and the grounds of it :—

“Taking as the basis of my remarks the collective American edition, I will here attempt a rude general classification of all the articles which compose it. I distribute them grossly into three classes :—

“*First*, into that class which proposes primarily to amuse the reader ; but which, in doing so, may or may not happen occasionally to reach a higher station, at which the amusement passes into an impassioned interest. Some papers are merely playful ; but others have a mixed character. These present *Autobiographic Sketches* illustrate what I mean. Generally, they pretend to little beyond that sort of amusement which attaches to any real story, thoughtfully and faithfully related, moving through a succession of scenes sufficiently varied, that are not suffered to remain too long upon the eye, and that connect themselves at every stage with intellectual objects. But, even here, I do not scruple to claim from the reader, occasionally, a higher consideration. At times, the narrative rises into a far higher key. . . .

“Into the *second* class I throw those papers which address themselves purely to the understanding as an insulated faculty ; or do so primarily. Let me call them by the general name of essays. These, as in other cases of the same kind, must have their value measured by two separate questions. A.—What is the problem, and of what rank in dignity or use, which the essay undertakes ? And next—that point being settled—B.—What is the success obtained ? and (as a separate question) What is the executive ability displayed in the solution of the problem ? This latter question is naturally no question for myself, as the answer would involve a verdict upon my own merit. But, generally, there will be quite enough in the answer to Question A for establishing the value of any essay on its soundest basis. *Prudens interrogatio est dimidium scientiæ*. Skilfully to frame your question, is half-way towards insuring the true answer. Two or three of the problems treated in these essays I will here rehearse [Mr. De Quincey here cites, as examples of the

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kind of writings which he refers to the second class, his essays on the following subjects: *Essenism*, *The Cæsars*, and *Cicero*.] These specimens are sufficient for the purpose of informing the reader that I do not write without a thoughtful consideration of my subject, and, also, that to think reasonably upon any question, has never been allowed by me as a sufficient ground for writing upon it, unless I believed myself able to offer some considerable novelty. Generally, I claim not arrogantly, but with firmness, the merit of rectification applied to absolute errors, or to injurious limitations of the truth.

"Finally, as a third class, and, in virtue of their aim, as a far higher class of compositions, included in the American collection, I rank *The Confessions of an Opium-Eater*, and also (but more emphatically, the *Suspiria de Profundis*. On these, as modes of impassioned prose, ranging under no precedents that I am aware of in any literature, it is much more difficult to speak justly, whether in a hostile or a friendly character. As yet neither of these two works has ever received the least degree of that correction and pruning which both require so extensively, and of the *Suspiria*, not more than perhaps one-third has yet been printed. When both have been fully revised, I shall feel myself entitled to ask for a more determinate adjudication on their claims as works of art. At present I feel authorized to make haughtier pretensions in right of their *conception* than I shall venture to do, under the peril of being supposed to characterize their *execution*. Two remarks only I shall address to the equity of my reader. First, I desire to remind him of the perilous difficulty besieging all attempts to clothe in words the visionary scenes derived from the world of dreams, where a single false note, a single word in a wrong key, ruins the whole music; and, secondly, I desire him to consider the utter sterility of universal literature in this one department of impassioned prose, which certainly argues some singular difficulty suggesting a singular duty of indulgence in criticising any attempt that even imperfectly succeeds. The sole *Confessions*, belonging to past times, that have at all succeeded in engaging the attention of men, are those of St. Austin and of Rousseau. The very idea of breathing a record of human passion, not into the ear of the random crowd, but of the saintly confessional, argues an impassioned theme. Impassioned, therefore, should be the tenor of the composition. Now, in St. Augustine's *Confessions* is found one most impassioned passage: viz., the lamentation for the death of his youthful friend in the fourth book; one, and no more. Farther, there is nothing. In Rousseau, there is not even so much. In the whole work there is nothing grandly affecting but the character and the inexplicable misery of the writer."

No one acquainted with Mr. De Quincey's writings, will deny the soundness and the completeness of this classification; nor do we think that a critic, proposing to himself so ambitious a task as an appreciation of Mr. De Quincey's genius as a whole, could do better than quietly assume it, and proceed to examine Mr. De Quincey's merits, first, as a writer of interesting memoirs; secondly, as an essayist or elucidator of difficult historical and other problems; and, lastly, as an almost unique practitioner of a peculiar style of imaginative or highly impassioned prose. Such an examination, conducted ever so rigorously, if by a competent person, would confirm the impression now entertained on all hands, that among the most remarkable names in the history of English literature for many a day, must be ranked that of

Thomas De Quincey. *Our* purpose, however, is by no means so extensive. We do not mean to comment on Mr. De Quincey as a writer of memoirs and narratives, nor to cull from his numerous contributions in that department—the present two volumes included—any of the delightful reminiscences with which they abound. We do not mean, either, to follow Mr. De Quincey through any of the various tracks of speculation into which his pure intellectual activity has led him, and thus to exhibit the delicacy and subtlety of his thinking faculty, the range of his observation and knowledge, and the value of his conclusions on obscure and vexed questions. In this department, we believe, he would be found fully entitled to the praise which he has claimed for himself—the praise of having been practically faithful to that theory of literature which maintains that no man is entitled to write upon a subject merely by having something reasonable to say about it, unless that something is also, to some extent, novel. It is with Mr. De Quincey, however, in the last of the three aspects in which he has presented himself to notice in the foregoing passage that we propose exclusively to concern ourselves. We thank Mr. De Quincey for having so presented himself. Not only, in so doing, has he indicated, with all due modesty, what he esteems his peculiar and characteristic place in English literature, and the scene and nature of his highest triumphs as a writer; he has also, at the same time, suggested a very curious subject for critical discussion. As it is a subject we have sometimes thought of, we are glad to have so fit an opportunity for saying a few words upon it.

By the established custom of all languages, there is an immense interval between the mental state accounted proper in prose composition, and that allowed, and even required, in verse. A man, for the most part, would be ashamed of permitting himself in prose the same freedom of intellectual whimsy, the same arbitrariness of combination, the same riot of imagery, the same care for the exquisite in sound and form, perhaps even the same depth and fervour of feeling, that he would exhibit unabashed in verse. There is an idea, as it

were, that if the matter lying in the mind waiting for expression is of a very select and rare kind, or if the mood is peculiarly fine and elevated, a writer must quit the platform of prose, and ascend into the region of metre. To use a homely figure, the feeling is that, in such circumstances, one must not remain in the plainly-furnished apartment on the ground-floor where ordinary business is transacted, but must step up-stairs to the place of elegance and leisure. Take, for example, the following passage from *Comus* :—

“ Sabrina fair,  
 Listen where thou art sitting  
 Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,  
 In twisted braids of lilies knitting  
 The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair ;  
 Listen for dear honour’s sake,  
 Goddess of the silver lake—  
 Listen and save.”

What we say is, that if any man, having preconceived exactly the tissue of meaning involved in this passage, had tried to express it in prose, he would have had a sense of shame in doing so, and would have run the risk of being regarded as a coxcomb. Only in verse will men consent, as a general rule, to receive such specimens of the intellectually exquisite ; but offer them never so tiny a thing of the kind in verse, and they are not only satisfied, but charmed. Nor is it only with regard to the peculiarly exquisite, or the peculiarly luscious in meaning, that this is true ; it is true, also, to a certain extent, of the peculiarly sublime, or the peculiarly magnificent. Thus Samson, soliloquizing on his blindness—

“ The vilest here excel me ;  
 They creep, yet see. I, dark, in light exposed  
 To daily fraud, contempt, abuse, and wrong ;  
 Within doors, or without, still as a fool  
 In power of others, never in my own,  
 Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.  
 O dark, dark, dark ; amid the blaze of noon  
 Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse,  
 Without all hope of day !  
 O, first-created beam, and thou great Word,  
 Let there be light, and light was over all ;  
 Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree ?  
 The sun to me is dark  
 And silent as the moon,  
 When she deserts the night,  
 Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.”

In prose something equivalent to this might have been permitted by reason of the severe impressiveness of the theme ; but to render the entire mass of thoughts and images acceptable precisely as they are, without retrenchment or toning down, one almost requires to see the golden cincture of the enclaspings verse. Take a passage where, this cincture having been purposely removed in the process of translation, the sheer meaning may be seen by itself in a tumbled prose-heap. The following is a description from *Æschylus*, literally translated :—

“ So Tydeus, raving and greedy for the fight, wars like a serpent in its hissings beneath the noon-tide heat, and he snites the sage seer, son of Oicleus, with a taunt, saying, that he is crouching to death and battle out of cowardice. Shouting out such words as these, he shakes their shadowy crests, the hairy honours of his helm, while beneath his buckler bells cast in brass are shrilly pealing terror. On his buckler, too, he has this arrogant device—a gleaming sky tricked out with stars, and in the centre a brilliant full moon conspicuous, most august of the heavenly bodies, the eye of night. Chafing thus in his vaunting harness, he wars beside the bank of the river, enamoured of conflict, like a steed champing his bit with rage, that rushes forth when he hears the voice of the trumpet.”

Knowing that this is translated from verse, we admire it ; but if it were presented to us as an original effort of description in prose, we should, though still admiring it, feel that it went beyond bounds. What we should feel would be, not that such a description ought not to be given, but that prose is not good enough and leisurely enough to have the honour of containing it. And, so generally, when a man launches forth in a grand strain, or when he begins to pour forth intellectual matter more than usually rich and luscious, our disposition is to interrupt him and persuade him to exchange the style of prose for that of metre. “ Had we not better step up stairs ? ” is virtually what we say on such occasions ; and this not ironically, but with a view to hear out what has to be said with greater pleasure. In short, we allow all ordinary business of a literary kind—plain statement, equable narrative, profound investigation, strong direct appeal—to be transacted in prose ; we even permit a moderate amount of beauty, of enthusiasm, and of imaginative play to intermingle with the current of prose-composition ; but there is a point, marked either by the unusual fineness of the matter of thought, its unusual

arbitrariness and luxuriance, its unusual grandeur, or its unusually impassioned character, at which, by a sort of law of custom, a man must either consent to be silent, or must lift himself into verse. On such occasions it is as when a speaker is expected to leave his ordinary place in the body of the house and mount the tribune.

There is an element in the philosophy of this matter which it may be well to attend to before going farther. We have spoken as if the meaning to be uttered were generally already in the mind, before the form of utterance is chosen. We have represented the case as if there were already internally prepared by a writer a certain tissue and series of thoughts and images, and as if it were then capable of being made a deliberate question whether he should emit the intellectual whole thus prepared in metre or in prose. But this is not the actual state of the fact. The actual fact is, that the meaning that will in any case exist to be expressed is conditioned beforehand by the form of expression selected—in other words, that the matter cogitated does not precede the form of expression and engage this or that form of expression at its option, but that the form of expression assists from the outset in determining the kind of matter that shall be cogitated. This removes a practical difficulty. A man who writes in prose is, by the fact that he does so, kept within the bounds of prose in the character of his mental combinations. Those peculiar finenesses and flights of intellectual activity which are native to verse, are then simply not developed. His thoughts stop short precisely at that point of richness, quaintness, or luxuriance where prose ceases to be prose. That this point will vary according to a writer's taste and faculty does not for the present matter. On the other hand, the writer who uses metre and rhyme does not prosecute his train of meaning independently of them, but partly by their very aid in leading him this way or that. A man who has made up his mind to add to all the other conditions of his thinking, these two—first, that he shall think in synchronism with certain metrical beats; and secondly, that he shall think forward, as it were, to that point in his mental horizon where he sees the glimmer of a certain predetermined

rhyme—necessarily accustoms himself to a more complex law of cogitation than rules the prose-writer, and moves through an atmosphere of more arbitrary and exquisite and occult suggestions. This may look mechanical, but it is the very *rationale* of verse and its functions. Versifiers are men who have voluntarily, in accordance with some original bent in their nature, submitted their thoughts to a more complex mechanism than ordinary prose-writers ; and whose reward is, that, when they are such masters of the mechanism as no longer to think of its existence, they can revel in combinations more intimate, extreme, and exquisite than their prose thoughts would be. In reading a passage of verse, therefore, we have to bear in mind that the meaning came in part to be what it is because the verse assisted to create it. Thus, in the passage quoted from *Comus*, it is unnecessary to trouble ourselves with fancying what reception such a dainty little picture would have met with if offered originally in prose ; for it is what it is, simply because metre and rhyme conspired in the production of it. So, also, in the passage from *Samson Agonistes*, the mass of thoughts and images would have stood somewhat different from the first, had it not been shaped implicitly to fill the mould of that precise metre. Again, in the description from *Æschylus*, whatever passes the degree of imaginative richness deemed suitable to prose, is justified by the recollection that these excesses were perpetrated in verse. And this last instance suggests an observation of some importance. It may happen—and does often happen—that the metrical form may have been necessary to the evolution of a particular piece of meaning, and may yet not be so necessary to the preservation and perpetuation of it, after it has been produced. Only under the condition of metre may a thought of special splendour or beauty have been actually excogitated ; and yet, once it is fairly on this side of the Styx, the metrical mould necessary for its safe conveyance hither may be fractured, and the thought will still stand appreciable on its own merits. And thus it is that much of the greatness of the highest poetry is indestructible by even the rudest process of transmutation into literal prose. The actual matter of Homer's *Iliad* and of the great



Greek tragedies might never have existed but for the suggestive power in the minds of the poets of those precise hexameters and iambic and choral measures in which it was imagined and delivered; but much of what is noble in it survives yet in the baldest prose translation. The preciousness of the thought is to be recognised, as it were, even after the fabric of the verse has been crumbled into the mere form of unmetrical powder.

All this, however, does not affect the practical importance of the consideration that custom has established a distinction between what is lawful in prose and what is lawful in verse. True, for the reasons above stated, the distinction causes no one any personal inconvenience. He who prefers to write in prose does so because he finds he can make prose sufficient. The necessity for writing in verse only exists where there is the prior habit, if we may so call it, of thinking in verse. When the thoughts of a prose-writer reach that degree of exquisiteness, or lusciousness, or imaginative grandeur, where prose refuses to contain them, nature provides the remedy by simply whirling the man into verse. He has the option of allowing himself to be so whirled, or of restraining himself, and refusing to go on whenever the said point is reached. He may choose never "to go up stairs," never to put himself into such a strain that it shall be necessary for him to ascend the tribune in order to speak. But here lies the great question. Where is that ideal point at which a man must either smother what is brewing in him, or ascend the tribune and speak in verse? What are the limits and capabilities of prose; and through what series of gradations does prose pass into technical and completed verse? If a man refuses to be whirled past the extreme prose point, what amount of farther intellectual possibility, and of what precise kind, does he thus forgo? Is the ulterior region into which verse admits co-extensive with that which it leaves behind; and, if not, what is its measure? Does it overhang the realm of prose like a superior ether, nearer the empyrean, or does it only softly round it to a small measurable distance? Is the relation of prose to verse that of absolute inferiority, or of inferiority in some

respects counterbalanced by superiority in others? In short, what is it that verse can do that prose cannot, and what is the value of this special kind of intellectual work which only verse can transact? We have spoken vaguely of the boundary between prose and verse as being marked by a certain degree of fineness, or exquisiteness, or occultness, or lusciousness, or arbitrariness, or grandeur, or passionateness in the matter of thought to be expressed; we must now seek for a more exact definition, so as to see what proportion of just human thought prose at its utmost will contain, and what residue must either be forgone or allowed to exhibit itself in verse.

It will be admitted, at least, that for all the purposes of what is called investigation, speculation, generalization, philosophical discussion and exposition, prose is sufficient. There is no need for a man "to step up stairs" so long as he deals with matter pertaining to what is called the pure understanding. A Kant, a Leibnitz, or a Sir William Hamilton, so far as their pure reasonings are concerned, need never find themselves whirled past the prose point, notwithstanding that the matters about which their reasoning is employed may be the generalities on which the universe rests, and that their conclusions in such matters may be the result of vast force of intellect, and may set the whole world in amaze. The actual reasonings of even a half-inspired Plato may be delivered to their last link without the aid of verse. This, then, is much to say in behalf of poor prose. It ought to silence the absurd chatter of many a versifier exulting in his technick without any just knowledge of what it really is. The large world-shaking abstraction, the profound all-penetrating stroke of intellect, the rich shower of fructifying propositions, the iron chain of conquering syllogisms—all these are possible to the prose-writer in a manner and to an extent beyond the legitimate or usual powers of verse. The verse of a Shakespeare, it is true, will teem with matter secreted by the purely intellectual organ, the same being so interfused with the poetic, that the superfetation does not seem a fault; and a Wordsworth may, in beautiful metre, reproduce the philosophizings of a Spinoza. But even these masters of verse could do nothing in this department by the help of their

iambics which equal power could not have done more rigorously and systematically with the iambics away. In passing into verse, the poet may take such matter with him, but he must treat it in such a manner that, from the point of view of the pure thinker, there is a loss of the logical virtue. This is a point which might be discussed at length ; suffice it to say that, with all the reverence that exists for poetry as distinct from prose, no one will deny that at the present moment there lies imbedded in the prose-treatises of the world, a mass of most precious substance distinct from all that can be found in verse.

Again, prose is sufficient for the expression of at least a large proportion of all possible human emotion. It would be difficult to say at what pitch of mere feeling it would be absolutely necessary to go "up stairs" for the sake of adequately expressing it. Joy, sorrow, indignation, rage, love, hatred—there is ample scope for the expression of these passions within the limits of prose. Impassioned prose oratory can exhibit as splendid renderings of some of these passions, as any that can be found in poetry. Indeed there are some passions—as, for example, those of laughter and indignation—which find a more natural utterance in prose. And yet it is precisely in this matter of the expression of feeling or passion, that we first come in sight of the natural origin of metre. At a certain pitch of fervour or feeling, the voice does instinctively lift itself into song. Intense grief breaks into a wail, great joy bursts into a measured shout, pride moves to a slow march ; all extreme passion tends to cadence. "And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept ; and, as he went, thus he said, Oh, my son, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom ! Would God I had died for thee ; Oh, Absalom, my son, my son !" Wherever there is emotion like this, we have a rudimentary metre in its expression ; and verse in all its forms is nothing else than the prolongation and extended ingenious application of this hint of nature. It may be laid down as a principle, therefore, that *impassioned* writing tends to the metrical ; and that, therefore, though this tendency may gratify itself to

a great length, almost to an indefinite length, within the limits of such wild metrical prose as it will itself create for the passing occasion, yet at a certain point in all feelings, and more particularly in such feelings as joy, sorrow, and love, it will overleap the boundary of what in any sense can be called prose, and seize, by a kind of necessity, on that artifice of verse which past custom has provided and consecrated. Walking by the river-side, full of thought and sadness, even the homely rustic minstrel will find it natural to pour forth his feelings to the established cadence of some well-known melody—

“But minstrel Burn cannot assuage  
His woes while time endureth,  
To see the changes of this age,  
Which fleeting Time procureth :  
Full many a place stands in hard case,  
Where joy was wont beforrow,  
With Humes that dwelt on Leader braes,  
And Scotts that dwelt on Yarrow ;”

the very tune of the thought, as it were, keeping time with the arm, as it moves with the bow of an imaginary violin. And so with more modern and more cultured poets. Thus Tennyson :—

“Break, break, break,  
On thy cold grey stones, O sea !  
And I would that my tongue could utter  
The thoughts that arise in me !  
  
O, well for the fisherman’s boy,  
That he shouts with his sister at play ;  
O, well for the sailor-lad,  
That he sings in his boat on the bay.  
  
And the stately ships go on  
To their haven under the hill ;  
But O for the touch of a vanished hand,  
And the sound of a voice that is still !  
  
Break, break, break,  
At the foot of thy crags, O sea !  
But the tender grace of a day that is dead  
Will never come back to me.”

This is not a case in which the same feeling, to the same intensity of pitch, could have been expressed in any form of metrical prose, and in which, therefore, the verse is only adopted to increase the beauty of the form ; it is, we verily believe, a case in which the feeling had to overleap the bounds

of possible prose, in search of a means of appropriate expression, on pain of being repressed or mutilated if these means were not found.

There remains now only the field of representative literature, the literature of the concrete. How far does prose stretch over this field; and what portion of it, if any, is the exclusive possession of verse? The field divides itself, theoretically speaking, into two halves or sections—the domain of mere history and description, in which the business of the writer is with the actual concrete, the actual scenes and events of the world; and the high domain of imagination or fiction, in which the business of the writer is with concrete furnished forth by his own creative phantasy.

Is prose sufficient for all the purposes of historical or descriptive writing, viewed as separately as may be from that department of imaginative writing into which it shades off so gradually? We should say that it is. We should say that for all the purposes of exact record, of exact reproduction of fact in all its vast variety of kinds—fact of scenery, fact of biography, fact of history, fact even of transacted passion—prose is sufficient, and verse unnecessary, or even objectionable. For the true and accurate retention and representation of all that man can observe (and a large and splendid function this is) prose is superior to verse; and when this function is committed to verse, there is an inevitable sacrifice of the pure aim of the function, though that sacrifice may at times be attended with the gain of something supposed to be better. That this statement may not be immediately assented to will arise from a confusion of the descriptive and the imaginative. Thomson's *Seasons*, and much of Wordsworth's poetry, are entitled descriptive compositions; but, properly considered, they are not records, but the imaginative use of records. Again, Homer is a narrative poet, but narration with him is but a special use of the imaginative faculty. Isolate strictly the department of historical or descriptive writing proper from that into which it so readily shades off, and prose is the legitimate king of it. We can conceive but of two apparent exceptions—first, where verse itself is one of the facts to be



recorded; and, secondly, where the historian or the describer waxes so warm in the act of description that he approaches the singing point. In the first case, verse must be treated as any other fact, that is, represented accurately, that is, quoted—which, however, is a prose feat; in the second case, it is not the facts that the historian sings, but his own impassioned feeling about them—a matter already provided for under another head.

And now for the real tug of war. What are the relative capabilities of Prose and Verse in the great field of fictitious or imaginative literature? It is needless to say that here it is that, by the universal impression of mankind, Verse is allowed the superior rank of the two sisters. The very language we use implies this. The word *poetry* literally means creation or fiction; and is thus co-extensive with the whole field of literature under notice. And yet it is by a deviation from the common usage of speech, that we use the word poetry in this its wide etymological sense. When we speak of a poet, we mean, unless we indicate otherwise, a man who writes in verse; when we speak of English poetry, we mean the library of English books written in verse. This is significant. It indicates the belief that the essential act of *ποίησις* is somehow connected with the metrical tendency, and best transacts itself in alliance with that tendency. In other words, it implies a conviction, founded if not on principle, at least on experience, that when the mind sets itself to work in that peculiar manner which we designate by the term imagination or imaginative exercise, the assumption of the metrical form of expression is natural, and, perhaps in some cases, essential to it. And yet this is contradicted at once, to some extent, by palpable fact. In the prose literature of all languages, there is a vast proportion of works in which the prevailing intention of the authors is that of strict *ποίησις*, the strict invention and elaboration of an imaginary or fictitious concrete. There is the novel, the prose romance, the sentimental tale, the whole body of the prose literature of imagination in its thousand forms. *Robinson Crusoe*, *Don Quixote*, the *Waverley Novels*, and the like, are



prose efforts of a kind as strictly falling under the head of *ποίησις* or creation, in its widest sense, as the *Prometheus Vincit*, *Paradise Lost*, or Tennyson's *Princess*. Accordingly, we do sometimes rank the writers of imaginative prose among poets or "makers." The question, then, arises: can we, by philosophical investigation, or by the examination of actual instances, determine in what precise conditions it is that the generic act of *ποίησις*, or imaginative exercise, disdains the level ground of prose, and even its highest mountain-tops, and rises instinctively and necessarily on the wings of verse?

There are various kinds of *ποίησις*, or imaginative exercise, according to the species of concrete imagined. There is the *ποίησις* of mere inanimate objects and scenery, as in much of Thomson; there is the *ποίησις* of physiognomy and costume, as in much of Scott and Chaucer; there is the *ποίησις* of incident and action, as in narrative poetry; there is the *ποίησις* of feelings and states of mind, as in songs; there is, as a kind of extension of this last, the *ποίησις* of character. From the masterly exercise of these different kinds of *ποίησις* in different forms of combination, arise the great kinds of poetry—the descriptive, the epic, the dramatic, and the lyric. But out of this objective classification of the varieties of imaginative exercise, can we derive the clue that we seek? At first sight not. If Thomson and Wordsworth describe imaginary scenes in verse, so do Dickens and Scott and a thousand others in prose; if we have admirable delineations of physiognomy and costume in the *Canterbury Pilgrimage*, so also have we in the *Waverley Novels*; if the *Iliad* is an effort of narrative imagination, so also is *Don Quixote*; if feelings and characters are represented in song and the Iambic drama, so are they also in prose fiction. And yet, as we hinted at the outset, there does seem to be a condition subsisting even in the nature of the objective matter imagined, when prose will not generally contain and convey that matter. What is that condition? The instances cited at the outset served vaguely to indicate it. In the quotation from Milton, and in that from Æschylus, it was felt that there was something in the actual matter of imaginary concrete presented by

the passages, which would have had to be parted with, if the medium had been prose. Thus, in the first passage, it was felt that the image of Sabrina

“ Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,  
In twisted braids of lilies knitting  
The loose train of her amber-dropping hair,”

would make poor prose too amorous. Again, in the passage from *Æschylus*, it was felt that the concrete description in the following sentence would have sustained some reduction, if the composition had originally been in prose.

“ On his buckler, too, he had this arrogant device—a gleaming sky tricked out with stars, and in the centre a brilliant full moon conspicuous (most august of the heavenly bodies, the eye of night).”

Prose might have given all of this as far as the parenthesis, but there it would have stopped.

So far as we had come to any conclusion from these instances as to the precise character of that concrete which prose instinctively refuses to carry, and which is yet welcome if it is presented in verse, we defined it as consisting in a certain unusual degree of richness, or lusciousness, or exquisiteness, or arbitrariness, or occultness, or grandeur, or passionateness. We will now limit the catalogue of qualities to these two, richness and arbitrariness; and aver, as an approximation to the truth, that the character of a concrete combination by the imaginative faculty pure, which determines that it must take place in verse, is either an unusual degree of richness, or an unusual degree of arbitrariness. This may not appear to reserve for verse a sufficient monopoly of interest in the great intellectual function of *ποίησις*; but, duly interpreted, we believe it will be found to correspond with the fact. It is not, we believe, the mere grandeur or magnificence of a phantasy, it is not its mere fineness or delicacy, or exquisiteness, that *necessarily* renders prose incapable of it; it is solely, or all but solely, its richness, or its arbitrariness. The limits of prose as regards the quality of passionateness, we have already said something about under a former head. What we call an “impassioned imagination,” is a mixed thing, consisting of an objective

phantasy, with a peculiar subjective mood breathed through it: it is *ποίησις* in conjunction with *παθησις*; and, having already considered when it is that *παθησις* breaks out into singing, we are only now concerned with the distinct inquiry at what point, if at any, *ποίησις* itself insists on becoming metrical.

In the first place, then, there is a peculiar *richness* of literary concrete of which prose seems to be incapable. By richness of concrete, we mean very much what is meant by excess of imagery. Let there be a splendid single combination of the poetical faculty—a splendid imaginary scene, a splendid imaginary incident or action, a splendid imaginary state of feeling or character—and prose will surely and easily compass it. The severe story of a Greek drama may be told in outline in noble prose; nay, each incident in such a drama may be rendered in a prose narrative, so as to be impressive and effective. The visual fancy of the blind Lear and his guide on the cliff at Dover, or of Milton's Satan alighting on the orb of the sun, and darkening it like a telescopic spot, may also be outlined in prose, so as finely to affect the imagination. And so, universally, a single imagined circumstance, however grand, or a moderately sparse tissue of imagined circumstances, may be delivered in prose. But when the outline is thickly filled up with imagery; when, in the expression of the main circumstance already imagined, masses of subsidiary circumstance are adduced; when the stem of the original poetic thought does not proceed straight and shaft-like, but is clustered over with rich parasitic fancies, then prose begins to despair. Thus, in Alexander Smith's image descriptive of the commencement of a friendship between one youth, the speaker, and another whom he admired:—

“ An opulent soul  
Dropt in my path like a great cup of gold,  
All rich and rough with stories of the gods.”

Here the main fancy, the cup of gold dropped in the youth's path, is perfectly within the compass of imaginative prose; but only a daring prose-writer would have turned the

cup so lovingly to show its rich chasing—or, as we say, would have so dallied with the image. Again, in the fine stanza from Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes* :—

“ And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,  
In blanch'd linen, smooth, and lavender'd ;  
While he from forth the closet brought a heap  
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd ;  
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,  
And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon ;  
Manna and dates, in argosy transferred,  
From Fez ; and spiced dainties, every one,  
From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.”

In some very luscious prose, such as we find in the *Arabian Nights*, we might have had the picture as elaborately finished, and even the same express catalogue of dainties ; but one or two of the touches of subsidiary circumstance, as in the first, seventh, and last lines, would have been almost certainly omitted. Again, much more visibly, in the following passage from *Paradise Lost*, describing Satan defying Gabriel and his host of warrior-angels.

“ While thus he spake, the angelic squadron bright  
Turn'd fiery red, sharpening in mooned horns  
Their phalanx, and began to hem him round  
With ported spears, as thick as when a field  
Of Ceres, ripe for harvest, waving bends  
Her bearded grove of ears, which way the wind  
Sways them ; the careful ploughman doubting stands,  
Lest on the threshing-floor his hopeful sheaves  
Prove chaff. On the other side, Satan alarmed,  
Collecting all his might, dilated stood,  
Like Teneriffe, or Atlas, unremoved.  
His stature reached the sky, and on his crest  
Sat horror plumed.”

Here, it is obvious, verse has left prose caught in the thicket. The main circumstance could have been represented in prose ; and prose might have dared one or two of the strokes of subsidiary imagination ; but such a profusion of simile and metaphor in so short a space would have bewildered and encumbered it. And so, generally, we may consider it as made out that prose is incapable of so rich a literary concrete as verse may justly undertake ; and that, where prose deals with pure poetic matter, a certain comparative thinness or sparseness is requisite in the texture of that matter, however bold, or fine, or grand may be the separate imaginations

which compose it. Hence it is, we think, that ancient classical poetry, and especially Greek epic and dramatic poetry, is more capable, as a whole, of retaining its impressiveness when translated into prose, than most modern poetry when similarly treated. The ancient poetry was more severe, delighting in imaginations clearly and separately sculptured; the modern muse favours richness of subsidiary imagery, and delights in ornamenting even its largest creations with minute tracery.

Again, in the second place, a certain degree of *arbitrariness* in an imaginative combination seems to place it beyond the capacity of ordinary prose. Our meaning will be best seen by an example or two. When Shelley says,

“ Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of eternity ;”

he presents to the mind a singularly beautiful image or combination, which is at once accepted and enjoyed. Yet it is a combination, so different from anything likely to have suggested itself to the logical understanding, or even to the imagination as swayed and directed by the logical understanding, that we question if it could have been arrived at but for that extraordinary nimbleness in seizing remote analogies which is communicated to the mind when it thinks under the complex law of metre. A prose-writer of great imaginative power will often strike out combinations of a high degree of arbitrariness, but rarely will he feel himself entitled to such an excursion into the occult as the above. So, also, in the following passage from Keats:—

“ O Sorrow !  
Why dost borrow  
The natural hue of health from vermeil lips ?  
To give maiden blushes  
To the white-rose bushes ?  
Or is it thy dewy hand the daisy tips ?

O Sorrow !  
Why dost borrow  
The lustrous passion from a falcon-eye ?  
To give the glow-worm light ?  
Or, on a moonless night,  
To tinge, on syren shores, the salt sea-spry ?”

Here, also, the links of association between idea and idea seem to be too occult, and the entire tissue of images too arbitrary, for prose to have produced a passage exactly equivalent; and yet, as it is presented to us in verse, we have no doubt as to the legitimacy of the combination, and are thankful for it. And the reason again is, that the mind, rising and falling on the undulation of metre—poised, so to speak, on metrical wings—is enabled to catch, as it were, more fantastic and airy analogies, and to dart to greater distances with less sense of difficulty, than when pacing never so majestically on the *terra firma* of prose. The following from Tennyson is a fine instance of the same:—

“The splendour falls on castle walls,  
And snowy summits old in story;  
The long light shakes across the lakes,  
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.  
Blow, bugle, blow; set the wild echoes flying.  
Answer, echoes, answer—dying, dying, dying;”

a combination, the coherence of which is felt by every imaginative mind, and which possesses a singular representative, as distinct from mere expository power; and which yet almost defies analysis. Tennyson, as one of those poets who have most remarkably restrained themselves to the *essential* domain of verse, not caring to write what prose might have had the power to execute, abounds with similar instances. In Shakespeare, too, who has by no means so restricted himself, but has, after his own prodigious fashion, torn up whole masses of the rough prose-world and submitted them, as well as the finer matter of poetic phantasy, to the all-crushing power of his verse, we find examples of the same hardly paralleled in the rest of literature. Thus, *ad aperturam*,—

“Thou remember’st  
Since once I sat upon a promontory,  
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin’s back,  
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,  
That the rude sea grew civil at her song,  
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,  
To hear the sea-maid’s music.”

H H



Again :—

“ Sit, Jessica ; look how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.  
There’s not the smallest orb that thou behold’st  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims.”

We will close this series of examples with a very apt one from Milton, describing the loathsome appearance of Sin and her brood at the gates of hell.

“ Far less abhorred than these  
Vexed Scylla, bathing in the sea that parts  
Calabria from the hoarse Trinacrian shore ;  
Nor uglier follow the night-hag, when, called  
In secret, riding through the air she comes,  
Lured with the smell of infant blood, to dance  
With Lapland witches, while the labouring moon  
Eclipses at their charms.”

All these examples seem to make it clear that there belongs to verse a certain extreme arbitrariness of imaginative association, sometimes taking the character of mere light extravagance of whimsy, sometimes leading to a ghastly and unearthly effect, and often surprising the mind with unexpected gleams of beauty and grandeur. For, though we have already maintained for prose the capability of pure grandeur and sublimity in imaginative effects, we must note here, as in the interest of verse, that one source of grandeur is this very licence of most arbitrary combination which verse gives.

Some light might, perhaps, be cast on this whole question of the relative and essential capabilities of verse and prose, by a study of the law of Shakespeare’s incessant instinctive shiftings in his dramas between the two modes of writing. In such a study it would require to be premised that, as Shakespeare stands, by birthright and choice, on the verse side of the river, and only makes occasional excursions to the prose side, it is to be expected that his practice will indicate rather the range within which prose has the sole title, than the extent of ground over which it may expatiate as joint-proprietor. Forbearing for the present, however, any such interesting inquiry, let us be content with the approximate

conclusions to which we have independently come. These may be recapitulated as follows:—That in the whole vast field of the speculative and didactic—a field in which the soul of man may win triumphs no wise inferior, let illiterate poetasters babble as they will, to those of the mightiest sons of song—prose is the legitimate monarch, receiving verse but as a visitor and guest who will carry back bits of rich ore and other specimens of the land's produce; that in the great business of record, also, prose is pre-eminent, verse but voluntarily assisting; that in the expression of passion, and the work of moral stimulation, verse and prose meet as co-equals, prose undertaking the rougher and harder duty where passion intermingles with the storm of current doctrine, and with the play and conflict of social interests—sometimes, when thus engaged, bursting forth into such strains of irregular music that verse takes up the echo, and prolongs it in measured modulation, leaving prose rapt and listening to hear itself outdone; and, lastly, that in the noble realm of poetry or imagination, prose also is capable of all exquisite, beautiful, powerful, and magnificent effects, but that, by reason of a greater ease with fancies when they come in crowds, and of a greater range and arbitrariness of combination, verse here moves with the more royal gait. And thus prose and verse are presented as two circles or spheres not entirely separate, as some would make them, but intersecting and interpenetrating through a large portion of both their bulks, and disconnected only in two crescents outstanding at the right and left, or, if you adjust them differently, at the upper and lower extremities. The left or lower crescent, the peculiar and sole region of prose, is where we labour amid the sheer didactic or the didactic combined with the practical and the stern; the right or upper crescent, the peculiar and sole region of verse, is where *παθησις* at its utmost thrill and ecstasy interblends with the highest and most daring *ποιησις*.

Now, what Mr. De Quincey, in his clear and modest self-appreciation, claims as one of his titles to a place in English literature, if not as his most valued title, is, that, being expressly a prose writer, he has yet, as a prose writer, pushed

farther into the peculiar and established domain of verse, as we have just defined it, than almost any other prose writer in the language. In the passage we quoted from him at the beginning of the article, he represents himself as almost a unique practitioner in at least one department of high impassioned and imaginative prose—that which partakes of the character of personal confessions. In universal literature he can refer but to one passage, in the *Confessions of St. Augustine*, as coming under the same literary precedents as parts of his own *Opium Eater* and of his *Suspiria de Profundis*. This is likely to be true, if Mr. De Quincey says it; but it is well to bear in mind (the more especially as there is a certain grammatical ambiguity in Mr. De Quincey's expression—"the utter sterility of universal literature in this one department of impassioned prose,"—which might lead to a misunderstanding of Mr. De Quincey's meaning), that if there has not been much of impassioned prose-writing of this one species, the literature of all languages contains noble specimens of impassioned and imaginative prose of one kind or another. To name the first example that occurs to us, Milton's prose works contain passages of such grandeur as almost to rival his poetry. Let the following stand as a specimen: it is the concluding passage of his treatise on the *Causes that have hindered the Reformation in England*, written in the form of an epistle to a friend.

"Oh! Sir, I do now feel myself inwrapt on the sudden into those mazes and labyrinths of dreadful and hideous thoughts, that which way to get out, or which way to end, I know not; unless I turn mine eyes, and with your help, lift up my hands to that eternal and propitious throne, where nothing is readier than grace and refuge to the distresses of mortal suppliants, and as it were a shame to leave those serious thoughts less piously than the heathen were wont to conclude their graver discourses.

"Thou, therefore, that sitst in light and glory unapproachable, Parent of angels and men! next, thee I implore, Omnipotent King, Redeemer of that lost remnant whose nature thou didst assume, Ineffable and Everlasting Love! and thou, the third subsistence of Divine Infinitude, Illumining Spirit, the joy and solace of created things!—one tri-personed Godhead! look upon this thy poor and almost spent and expiring Church; leave her not thus a prey to these importunate wolves, that wait and think long till they devour thy tender flock—these wild boars that have broke into thy vineyard, and left the print of their polluting hoofs on the souls of thy servants. Oh! let them not bring about their damned designs that now stand at the entrance of the bottomless pit, expecting the watchward to open and let out those dreadful locusts and scorpions to reinvolve us in that pitchy cloud of infernal darkness, where we shall never more see the sun of thy truth again, never hope for the

cheerful dawn, never more hear the bird of morning sing. Be moved with pity at the afflicted state of this our shaken monarchy, that now lies labouring under her throes, and struggling against the grudges of more dreaded calamities.

“Oh ! Thou, that after the impetuous rage of five bloody inundations and the succeeding sword of intestine war, soaking the land in her own gore, didst pity the sad and ceaseless revolution of our swift and thick-coming sorrows—when we were quite breathless, didst motion peace and terms of covenant with us, and having first well-nigh freed us from anti-Christian thralldom, didst build up this Britannic empire to a glorious and enviable height, with all her daughter islands about her—stay us in this felicity ; let not the obstinacy of our half-obedience and will-worship bring forth that viper of sedition that for these fourscore years has been breeding to eat through the entrails of our peace ; but let her cast her abortive spawn without the danger of this travailing and throbbing kingdom, that we may still remember, in our solemn thanksgivings, how for us the northern ocean, even to the frozen Thule, was scattered with the proud shipwrecks of the Spanish Armada, and the very maw of hell ransacked, and made to give up her concealed destruction, ere she could vent it in that horrible and damned blast.

“Oh, how much more glorious will those former deliverances appear, when we shall know them not only to have saved us from greatest miseries past, but to have reserved us for greatest happiness to come ! Hitherto Thou hast but freed us, and that not fully, from the unjust and tyrannous chain of thy foes ; now unite us entirely, and appropriate us to Thyself ; tie us everlastingly in willing homage to the prerogative of thy Eternal throne.

“And now we know, O Thou, our most certain hope and defence, that thine enemies have been consulting all the sorceries of the great whore, and have joined their plots with that sad intelligencing tyrant that mischiefs the world with his mines of Ophir, and lies thirsting to revenge his naval ruins that have larded our seas : but let them all take counsel together, and let it come to nought ; let them decree and do thou cancel it ; let them gather themselves and be scattered ; let them embattle themselves and be broken ; let them embattle and be broken, for thou art with us.

“Then, amidst the hymns and hallelujahs of saints, some one may perhaps be heard offering at high strains, in new and lofty measures, to sing and celebrate thy divine mercies and marvellous judgments in this land throughout all ages ; whereby this great and warlike nation, instructed and inured to the fervent and continual practice of truth and righteousness, and casting far from her the rags of her old vices, may press on hard to that high and happy emulation, to be found the soberest, wisest, and most Christian people, at that day, when Thou, the Eternal and shortly-expected King, shalt open the clouds to judge the several kingdoms of the world, and, distributing national honours and rewards to religious and just commonwealths, shalt put an end to all earthly tyrannies, proclaiming the universal and mild monarchy through heaven and earth. Where they undoubtedly, that by their labours, counsels, and prayers, have been earnest for the common good of religion and their country, shall receive, above the inferior order of the blessed, the regal addition of principalities, legions, and thrones, under their glorious titles, and, in supereminence of beatific vision, progressing the dateless and irrevoluble circle of eternity, shall clasp inseparable hands with joy and bliss, in over measure for ever. But they, contrary, that by the impairing and diminution of the true faith, the distresses and servitude of their country, aspire to high dignity, rule, and promotion here, after a shameful end in this life (which God grant them !) shall be thrown down eternally into the darkest and deepest gulf of hell, where, under the spiteful control, the trample and the spurn of all the other damned, that in the anguish of their tortures, shall have no other ease than to exercise a raving and bestial tyranny over them, as their slaves and negroes, they shall remain in that plight for ever, the basest, the lowermost, the most dejected, most underfoot and down-trodden vassals of perdition.”

This may pass as a specimen of *impassioned* prose hardly to be matched in the English language. For specimens of what may more properly be called *imaginative* prose, we might refer also to English writers, and to some English writers now living. But in this connexion it is perhaps fairest to name that foreign writer, who, by the general consent of literary Europe, is accounted *facile princeps* among all prose invaders of the peculiar dominion of verse—the German, Jean Paul. All who are acquainted with the writings of Jean Paul, must be aware that, whatever is to be said of his genius as a whole, or in comparison with that of his compatriot Goethe, in the single faculty of wild and rich prose-poetry he is the most astonishing even of German writers. Passages verifying this might be quoted in scores from his fictions. The famous dream of *Christ and the Universe* is perhaps the grandest and most daring phantasy of the kind in literature; and, had we space, we should quote it. We will quote, instead, a shorter and less awful passage—the singularly beautiful conclusion of the novel of *Quintus Fiacchin*, describing the solitary walk homewards of a man who has just left two dear friends.

“We were all of us too deeply moved. We at last tore ourselves asunder from repeated embraces, my friend retired with the soul whom he loves. I remained alone behind him with the night.

“And I walked without aim through woods, through valleys, and over brooks, and through sleeping villages, to enjoy the great Night like a Day. I walked, and still looked like the magnet, to the region of midnight, to strengthen my heart at the gleaming twilight, at this upstretching aurora of a morning beneath our feet. While night butterflies flitted, white blossoms fluttered, white stars fell, and the white snow powder hung silvery in the high shadow of the Earth, which reaches beyond the Moon, and which is our Night. Then began the Æolian harp of creation to tremble and to sound, blown on from above; and my immortal soul was a string in this harp. The heart of a brother, everlasting Man, swelled under the everlasting Heaven, as the seas swell under the sun and under the moon. The distant village clocks struck in dought, musing, as it were, with the ever pealing tone of ancient Eternity. The limbs of my buried ones touched cold on my soul, and drove away its blots, as dead hands heal eruptions of the skin. I walked silently through little hamlets, and close by their outer churchyards, where crumpled upcast coffin boards were glimmering, while the once bright eyes that had lain in them were mouldered into grey ashes. Cold thought clutch not like a cold spectre at my heart. I look up to the starry sky, and an everlasting chain stretches thither, and over, and below, and all is life, and warmth, and light, and all is God, he or God.

“Towards morning I descried thy late lights, little city of my dwelling, which I belong to on this side the grave; I returned to the earth, and in the steeples, behind the by-advanced great midnight, it struck half-past two. About this hour, in 1794, Mars went down in the west, and the moon



rose in the east; and my soul desired, in grief for the noble warlike blood which is still streaming on the blossoms of spring: 'Ah, retire, bloody Warlike red Mars; and thou, still Peace, come forth, like the mild divided moon.' —MR. CARLYLE'S *Translation*.

Even after such a passage as this, there are passages in Mr. De Quincey's writings, whose power as specimens of impassioned and imaginative prose would be felt as something new. His *Confessions*, his *Suspiria de Profundis*, and even his present volumes of *Autobiographic Sketches*, contain passages which, for weird and sublime beauty, and for power of embodying the impalpable and the visionary, are not surpassed anywhere in poetry. Take the following as an example: it is an attempt to impersonate and generalize in distinct living shapes those various forms or powers of sorrow that hold dominion over man and human life. As there are three Graces, three Fates, and three Furies, so, says De Quincey, there are three Ladies of Sorrow:—

“THE THREE LADIES OF SORROW.

“The eldest of the three is named *Mater Lachrymarum*, our Lady of Tears. She it is that night and day raves and moans, calling for vanished faces. She stood in Rama, when a voice was heard of lamentation—‘Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted.’ She it was that stood in Bethlehem on the night when Herod’s sword swept its nurseries of innocents, and the little feet were stiffened for ever, which, heard at times as they tottered along floors overhead, woke pulses of love in household hearts that were not unmarked in heaven. Her eyes are sweet and subtle, wild and sleepy by turns; oftentimes rising to the clouds; oftentimes challenging the heavens. She wears a diadem round her head. And I knew by childish memories that she could go abroad upon the winds, when she heard the sobbing of litanies or the thundering of organs, and when she beheld the mustering of summer clouds. This sister, the elder, it is that carries keys more than Papal at her girdle, which open every cottage and every palace. She, to my knowledge, sate all last summer by the bedside of the blind beggar, him that so often and so gladly I talked with, whose pious daughter, eight years old, with the sunny countenance, resisted the temptations of play and village mirth to travel all day long on dusty roads with her afflicted father. For this did God send her a great reward. In the spring-time of the year, and whilst yet her own spring was budding, he took her to Himself. But her blind father mourns for ever over *her*; still he dreams at midnight that the little guiding hand is locked within his own; and still he wakens to a darkness that is *now* within a second and a deeper darkness. This *Mater Lachrymarum* also has been sitting all this winter of 1844–45 within the bedchamber of the Czar, bringing before his eyes a daughter (not less pious) that vanished to God not less suddenly, and left behind her a darkness not less profound. By the power of her keys it is that Our Lady of Tears glides, a ghostly intruder, into the chamber of sleepless men, sleepless women, sleepless children, from Ganges to the Nile, from Nile to Mississippi; and her, because she is the first-born of her house, and has the widest empire, let us honour with the title of ‘Madonna.’

“The second sister is called *Mater Suspiriorum*, Our Lady of Sighs. She neither scales the clouds, nor walks abroad upon the winds. She wears no



diadem. And her eyes, if they were ever seen, would be neither sweet nor subtle; no man could read their story; they would be found filled with perishing dreams and with wrecks of forgotten delirium. But she raises not her eyes; her head, on which sits a dilapidated turban, droops for ever—for ever fastens on the dust. She weeps not. She groans not. But she sighs inaudibly at intervals. Her sister, Madonna, is oftentimes stormy and frantic—raging in the highest against heaven, and demanding back her darlings. But Our Lady of Sighs never clamours, never defies, dreams not of rebellious aspirations. She is humble to abjectness. Hers is the meekness that belongs to the hopeless. Murmur she may, but it is in her sleep. Whisper she may, but it is to herself in the twilight. Mutter she does at times, but it is in solitary places that are desolate as she is desolate, in ruined cities, and when the sun has gone down to rest. This sister is the visitor of the Pariah, of the Jew, of the bondsman to the oar in Mediterranean galleys, of the English criminal in Norfolk Island, blotted out from remembrance in sweet far-off England, of the baffled penitent reverting his eye for ever upon a solitary grave, which to him seems the altar overthrown of some past and bloody sacrifice, on which altar no oblations can now be availing, whether towards pardon that he might implore, or towards reparation that he might attempt. Every slave that at noonday looks up to the tropical sun with timid reproach, as he points with one hand to the earth our general mother, but for *him* a stepmother, as he points with the other hand to the Bible our general teacher, but against *him* sealed and sequestered;—every woman sitting in darkness, without love to shelter her head, or hope to illumine her solitude, because the heaven-born instincts kindling in her nature germs of holy affections, which God implanted in her womanly bosom, having been stifled by social necessities, now burn sullenly to waste, like sepulchral lamps among the ancients;—every nun defrauded of her unreturning May-time by wicked kinsmen, whom God will judge;—every captive in every dungeon;—all that are betrayed, and all that are rejected, outcasts by traditionary law, and children of *hereditary* disgrace—all these walk with ‘Our Lady of Sighs.’ She also carries a key; but she needs it little. For her kingdom is chiefly among the tents of shame, and the houseless vagrant of every clime. Yet in the very highest ranks of men she finds chapels of her own; and even in glorious England there are some that, to the world, carry their heads as proudly as the reindeer, who yet secretly have received her mark upon their foreheads.

“But the third sister, who is also the youngest—! Hush! whisper, whilst we talk of *her*! Her kingdom is not large, or else no flesh should live; but within that kingdom all power is hers. Her head, turreted like that of Cybele, rises almost beyond the reach of night. She droops not; and her eyes, rising so high, *might* be hidden by distance. But, being what they are, they cannot be hidden; through the treble veil of crape which she wears, the fierce light of a blazing misery, that rests not for matins or for vespers—for noon of day, or noon of night—for ebbing or for flowing tide—may be read from the very ground. She is the defier of God. She is also the mother of lunacies, and the suggestress of suicides. Deep lie the roots of her power; but narrow is the nation that she rules. For she can approach only those in whom a profound nature has been upheaved by central convulsions; in whom the heart trembles and the brain rocks under conspiracies of tempest from without and tempest from within. Madonna moves with uncertain steps, fast or slow, but still with tragic grace. Our Lady of Sighs creeps timidly and stealthily. But this youngest sister moves with incalculable motions, bounding, and with tiger’s leaps. She carries no key; for, though coming rarely amongst men, she storms all doors at which she is permitted to enter at all. And *her* name is *Mater Tenebrarum*, Our Lady of Darkness.”

In this noble piece of prose, as in the passages from Milton and Richter, no one can fail to remark, in exact accordance with what we have advanced in the course of this article, that

precisely as the passion gains in force and intensity, and the pure process of poetic combination transacts itself with ease and vigour, the language acquires and sustains a more decided metrical cadence. It would not be difficult to arrange parts of the passages so that what has been printed as prose should present to the eye the appearance of irregular verse. And so generally, a peculiar rhythm or music will always be found in highly impassioned or imaginative prose. The voice swells with its burthen; the hand rises and falls; and the foot beats time. And thus, as we have more than once said, prose passes into verse by visible gradations. Still, there is a clear line of separation between the most metrical prose, and what is conventionally recognised as verse; and with all the great effects that may be produced on this side of the line of separation, Prose, as such, is entitled to be credited. And why should not prose do its utmost? Why should we not have more men like Richter and De Quincey to teach prose its uses and capabilities? "The muse of prose-literature," we have ventured to say on another occasion, "has been very hardly dealt with. We see not why, in prose, there should not be much of that mighty licence in the fantastic, that measured riot, that right of whimsy, that unabashed dalliance with the extreme and the beautiful, which the world allows, by prescription, to verse. Why may not one in prose chase forest-nymphs, and see little green-eyed elves, and delight in peonies and musk-roses, and invoke the stars and roll mists about the hills, and watch the seas thundering through caverns, and dashing against the promontories? Why, in prose, quail from the grand or ghastly on the one hand, or blush with shame at too much of the exquisite on the other? Is prose made of iron? Must it never weep—must it never laugh; never linger to look at a buttercup, never ride at a gallop over the downs? Always at a steady trot, transacting only such business as may be done within the limits of a soft sigh on the one hand, and a thin smile on the other, must it leave all finer and higher work of imagination to the care of sister verse?" All speed, then, to the prose invasion of the peculiar realm of verse; and the farther the conquest can proceed,

perhaps the better in the end for both parties. The time is perhaps coming when the best prose shall be more like verse than it now is, and the best verse shall not disdain a certain resemblance to prose.

A word in conclusion, to prevent misconception. We have tried to define the special and peculiar domain of verse ; but we have scrupulously avoided saying anything that would imply an opinion that verse may not, both lawfully and with good effect, go beyond that domain. We have all along supposed the contrary. Verse, merely as a form of expression, has charms of its own. A thought, or an incident, or a feeling, which may be perfectly well expressed in prose, may be rendered more pleasing, more impressive, and more memorable, by being expressed in metre or rhyme. If a man has some doctrine or theory which he wishes to expound, there is no reason, if he finds it possible, and chooses to take the trouble, why he should not make the exposition a metrical one ; and, if his verses are good, there is every probability that, on account of the public relish for metre in itself, his exposition will take a more secure place in literature than would have been attained by a corresponding piece of didactic prose. So also a witticism, or a description, or a plain, homely story, may often be delivered more neatly, tersely, and delightfully, if it comes in the garb of verse. In the same way, a man may impress more powerfully some strongly-felt sentiment, by throwing it into a series of nervous and hearty lines. In short, we ought to be ready to accept wit in metre, or narrative in metre, or politics in metre, or anything else in metre, when we can get it ; and we ought, in every such case, to allow all that additional credit to the author which is due to his skill in so delightful an art as versification. Much of the poetry of Horace, all the satires of Juvenal, the *Hudibras* of Butler, Pope's metrical essays, and many other compositions of tolerably diverse kinds, may be cited as examples of that order of poetry which consists of shrewdness, wit, manly feeling, and general intellectual vigour manifesting themselves in metre. Who does not admire the exquisite literary felicity displayed in such works, and who, having them in his mind,

can remain insensible to the claims of verse, to range at large wherever it chooses to go? What we wish to make clear, however, is, that a distinction may and must be drawn between verse considered as an essential condition of a peculiar kind of thought, and verse considered as an optional form of expression, which may be chosen, in almost any case, for the sake of its fine and elegant effects. The fact that verse may be regarded in this latter aspect is, we think, the sole justification of nine-tenths of what is called poetry in all languages.

THE END.



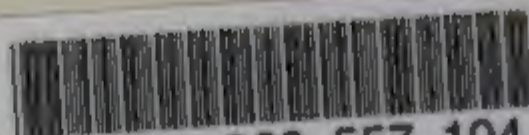












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